



“That’s Not Fair!” – How to Handle Siblings’ Complaints About Inequality

A popular phrase for siblings is, “That’s not fair!” How can parents respond when brothers and sisters demand equality when equality isn’t possible? The bottom line: never promise complete equality.

Siblings often perceive unfairness concerning possessions and privileges.

Problem: One sibling complains when another sibling gets something that he wants too but can’t have.

Solution: Emphasize that you will do your best to be fair, but that you cannot ever spend the exact amount of money or give an equal value of things to each brother and sister. Do not make comparisons. The distribution of treats and gifts varies over time.

Problem: A younger sibling complains about what the older sibling gets to do that she can’t do.

Solution: Emphasize that as kids get older, they have different privileges. Show understanding, but explain that they will gain privileges as they get older. Every child is different and you cannot promise that all children will have the exact same privileges.

Problem: Siblings close in age and siblings of the same gender may have more problems with perceptions of fairness.

Solution: Focus on the uniqueness of each child. Each child has different likes and temperaments so the giving of possessions and privileges varies with each child. Work to balance what each child is given, but do not attempt exact equality.

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