

In the name of love

Are you overly competitive with your brothers or sisters? Do you go into a jealous rage when your siblings excel, succeed or perform better than you? To what extent is your behaviour and your performance affected by wanting to please your loved ones or to be acknowledged by them?

Sibling rivalry is competition between siblings for love and attention from parents and other relatives. When siblings are growing up they compete for their parents' love, affection and attention, and they are sensitive to differences in parental treatment from a very early age.

When children feel they are getting unequal amounts of their parents' attention, fighting between siblings can occur. This rivalry can continue into adulthood with competition for who is the most successful, most acknowledged or most accomplished in the family. While healthy competition between siblings can help each child to excel and succeed, unhealthy competition can be very disempowering and damaging.

Insecurities feed the rivalry

Unhealthy sibling rivalry can only exist if siblings have their own insecurities because it is those insecurities that feed the rivalry through emotions of jealousy, envy, resentment, betrayal, anger, etc. Rivalry can develop very early on in life based on how each sibling interprets their upbringing and their relationship with their parents.

It can take only one event in early childhood to trigger sibling rivalry. For example, a new brother or sister being born can cause the existing sibling to feel jealous, abandoned or unloved as a result of more attention being given to the newborn. With

those emotions left unaddressed, subsequent family dynamics can be misinterpreted by that sibling in a negative way, adding to those emotions and fuelling the sibling rivalry.

Family dynamics

The order of birth (first born, middle child, youngest) can also create rivalry if a child is being compared to their siblings, which can continue into adulthood. Think of the TV show "Everyone Loves Raymond", where Raymond is the youngest spoilt son, while Robert, the eldest son, feels unloved. The two brothers constantly compete for their mother's attention and recognition, and the mother encourages and thrives on it.

Innocent off the cuff comments made by parents (e.g. why can't you be like your sister?), can be interpreted by a child as them being judged, not being good enough, being unloved, etc. Too much attention directed at one child or more support for one child and/or their hobbies can create the perception of favourites. Differences in how school and sporting achievements are acknowledged and compared between siblings can also create perceptions of favouritism. Extra hugs or comments by relatives directed at one sibling over another can create rivalry, unhealthy competition, perfectionist behaviours, etc.

Even significant emotional events in adulthood can trigger childhood memories long forgotten, or unconscious rivalries between siblings. For example, two brothers had a very harmonious relationship with each other until one brother went through a very bitter divorce, which brought up his insecurities from childhood about being unloved. This revealed a subtle unconscious rivalry between the two brothers that existed since childhood and started an outright competition between the two over whose children were more accomplished.

Ending the rivalry

As you reflect on your relationship with your siblings, notice your response to them and how your parents and relatives treat you compared to your brothers and sisters. Do you constantly

think about how to out-do your sibling (for example, going on and on about your successes compared to your brother's or sister's achievements at family events)?

Once you have identified your unhealthy patterns, commit to ending the cycle. Make a list of all the benefits to you for stopping the unhealthy sibling rivalry, as well as the benefits to you for continuing the rivalry. As you look at the lists, which is longer and more compelling for you? In what positive ways can you get the same benefits you now receive from continuing the rivalry, when you stop it?

If you hold on to past hurts, anger, rejection, betrayal, abandonment, etc. you will keep having these "buttons" pushed by your siblings/family until you resolve them. Similarly, if you believe you are being judged, are unloved, etc., and these beliefs are left unresolved, they can also trigger an overreaction to what your siblings/family say or do, and lead to rivalry.

With the above commitment and insight, address the unhealthy patterns and watch your relationships with your siblings and relatives blossom as the rivalry ends once and for all. em

.....
Dr. Vesna Grubacevic is the founder of award-winning company Q!, an NLP Trainer, who holds a PhD in Clinical Hypnotherapy and a BEc. She is an author, speaker and the creator of breakthrough behavioural change techniques. For more techniques on improving your relationships and for your free gifts, visit www.qttransformation.com

