How to Help Siblings Get Along (Specially When One Is Dysregulated) #parenting Transcript

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Sibling Conflict as a Family System Issue

When one child is dysregulated, sibling conflict isn't a behavior problem, it's a system problem. That's really driving sibling conflict. A lot of us have siblings that don't get along.

Maybe even you dont get a long with your sibling. But it's tough when you're a referee. I always talk about it as like youre moderating a WWE match because that's what it feels like when your kids don t along and it can go on for years.

It's not just when kids are little. What's really happening? When one child is dysregulated, the whole family system absorbs it. And what parents usually see is constant fighting, one kid melting down while the other escalates.

You're seeing the resentment building between these kids. These kids are like, I don't want to sit next to him or her in the car, a lot of jealousy. Parents really feel stuck mediating instead of parenting.

But underneath this behavior is siblings that don't just fight because they don t dislike each other. They fight, because their nervous system environment feels unsafe.

or unfair. What's happening with the nervous system of a dysregulated kid, a disregulated sibling and a regulated sibling?

How Dysregulation Affects Siblings

So the dys-regulating kid when their nervous is overwhelmed, impulse control drops, emotional reactions go through the roof and interactions that feel neutral really or should be neutral feel threatening.

This isn't intentional. They can really start getting aggressive because the stress is leaking out sideways and it's got somewhere it has got to go. When the other siblings living aside a dysregulated kid, just so you know, working with people for three decades, I've had a lot of families, including my own, where one kid is regulated and another isn't.

And when you do this, the way that we talk about what we're going to talk, about these kids are the siblings who are regulated, really want to be incredible human beings that are really compassionate.

And these kids can get along. It's just not easy when somebody is dysregulated. That's why we're talking all about this. hit is all about. And of course, the regulated child summit so that you can have a chance to add these things in whatever way you, whether it's the show or the summit or book or my coming com certification or any of the products we have, it is leading you to the same path, how to regulate.

It's just what is right for you. I'm a huge book reader. Actually, I have so many books. Its unbelievable. but I often buy the audio book and the writing book, one of those girls.

What Normal vs. Chronic Sibling Conflict Looks Like

What we see for them in these kids that are really struggling, what's driving it is a lot of feeling about unpredictability, feeling overlooked or deprioritized and pressure to be the easy one for that sibling.

It starts to build a resentment when rules feel uneven and their nervous system responds with provoking bossy, teasing, withdrawing, and exploding back.

They start to become an instigator too, or an avoider. So different behavior, same dysregulation. And because they're typically not the instigator, they don't get the same kind of intention that they are dys-regulated siblings.

When do we worry and what's normal? Normal sibling conflict is occasional arguments, a little jealousy here and there, especially during transitions in life.

competition for attention, you know, conflicts that resolve with adult support. But a typical sibling conflict is when fights happen every day, escalates quickly, recovery is slow for one kid or incomplete, and parents feel like full-time referee at the WWE match.

And other siblings become anxious, angry, or withdrawn. This isn't kids need better manners issue. It's a regulation capacity. capacity issue. So is this family nervous system, are we ever getting into a parasympathetic state or not?

Because if you're not, we are co-disregulated. What happens with advice that parents get about managing siblings? Cause it is a really big issue and you know who does a great job talking about this is Dr.

Becky.

Why Common Parenting Advice Falls Short

She does great jobs talking to young kids. This is advice for all ages. This is why common advice falls apart. So parents are often told, just treat them exactly the same.

They need to work it out themselves. Don't give special treatment. But equality is not the And a dysregulated kid needs different support, not more punishment.

You're not going to punish this out. They may have difficulty seeing the other side. There could be a lot of reasons why. And siblings, they are often told to just suck it up.

But they need acknowledgement, not silence. They need support. I recently had a parent tell me, I feel like everything revolves around my dysregulated kid and my other kids are angry all the time about it.

And they were really concerned about the long term impact, the psychological impact on the siblings. Um, and I'm not going to lie. One of the kids was like, mad.

bad and needed her own therapy about it. But when we really focused on who, not focusing on, who started it, but started focusing, on regulating first, that's when things started to shift in the house.

They regulated the dysregulated child before shared activities, gave predictability to all the siblings, a little more one-to-one time with them, and they named what was happening instead of minimizing.

The fighting didn't disappear overnight, but the tension did drop and connection returned. And also parents really got to understand that some level of sibling fighting is normal.

Okay.

Regulating the System and Supporting Siblings

There is some normality, but when it's happening all the time and it really the bane of the existence of everybody there, you got do something about it.

You can't just say, get over it, figure it out. Sibling conflict isn't about fairness. It's about felt safety. When one child's nervous system is on fire, everyone feels that heat and everyone else really can be struggling and there needs to be a level of sheer support.

So what helps? Okay, number one, regulate the most dysregulated nervous systems. First, this isn't favoritism, it's triage. Calming one nervous, lowers the temperature for everybody.

This is a big deal. Again, think of it like triage. Somebody has got, five people have a cut, but one, it's an artery, you're going to go after the artery.

It's the same thing. Two, separate regulation from problem solving. Don't force apologies or lessons in the moment. Come first, teach later. That's how the brain works.

Number three, name the pattern out loud. Say things like, your sibling's brain is having a hard time right now. This isn't because you did something wrong.

Naming reduced resentment and shame. You can also add a part to that by saying we all have hard times sometimes because we want to normalize dysregulation and lead kids to solution, not focusing on what the actual problem is.

And that makes a big difference for everybody. Okay, number four, protect the other sibling's nervous system. Make sure they have safe spaces, predictable attention, permission to step away.

They aren't required to tolerate chaos and quote unquote be kind. Be good, just be nice. Your brother always has a hard time. You can really talk about it, name it and help them to understand.

I found that to be incredibly helpful.

Practical Steps to Restore Safety at Home

during our pans episodes when my JC was so little he had a lot of capacity sometimes more than I did for tolerance for some of these things but just saying like oh his brain's having a hard time instead of he's Having a Hard Time made a difference okay number five stop playing the judge start being the regulator when parents referee behavior instead Of regulating the system everyone and every behavior is going to escalate nobody feels safe You remember your comm is that anchor and it's not easy, but C and comms is co-regulation for a reason because you are actually creating a frequency that regulates your child.

What are you going to do? This week, you're just going to regulate every time before you go into the referee match, before your correcting, for your guided.

One regulated response can shift an entire dynamic. And once you create that predictability, the nervous system will start calming without you even saying a word, which is so cool when you start doing that.

It really becomes. Just this powerful tool, and it's hard for you sometimes to get there, I know, but you can do it. Okay, so sibling harmony doesn't come from forcing fairness, it comes from restoring the nervous system safety for everyone, not just that one dysregulated kid, It's all parties.

When you regulate the system, connection follows and that's a big deal. So if sibling conflict feels constant and exhausting and you don't want to guess your way through it, that is what the solution matcher is to help you understand what's driving dysregulation in your home so you can support all your little kiddos appropriately.

And all you have to do is go to drrosanne.com forward slash help and take the solution manager and it's going to guide you on the right path to where you need to go.

Want more insights and solutions? Well, subscribe to our dysregulation insider and It will show up in your inbox every week.