



Adult Sibling Rivalry And the Holidays

by Dr. Elizabeth Carr

Have you asked yourself, “Will getting along with my siblings ever get easier?”

For many of us this question comes to a head during the holidays. Jennifer has struggled in her relationship with her sister for over 20 years. She thought things would get easier once everyone grew up and moved out. Yet,

to her surprise, holiday get-togethers still bring up old feelings. “In the past we would argue about who got what from mom and dad. Now, that concern is about our kids, and whether they are receiving equal treatment from our parents.”

Alice agrees, “I remember last year counting the gifts for my daughter

and getting upset when her cousin got one more. It sounds selfish, but I always thought my mother loved my sister more and I believed it could be viewed in the amount of times she thought of one grandchild over the other.”

In some cases, winter blues are more about family dynamics than lack of

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sun light. "The more things change, the more they stay the same," remarks another interviewee, Debra. "The holidays become a repeat performance of every holiday that ever was. Everyone assumes their position in the family system and we all know how to act—or act up as the case may be."

Here are some signs that sibling rivalry may be affecting your relationship with your family. 1) You dread going to family gatherings. 2) You get sucked into one-upmanship with siblings when discussing your kids/house/job etc. 3) You find yourself badmouthing your siblings to your kids, spouse, parents, other siblings, or whoever will listen; or you hear that a sibling is badmouthing you. 4) You feel jealousy, resentment, frustration, or guilt during and after family get-togethers.

Someone once wisely remarked: If you're able to be back home for three hours without regressing into adolescence, you're doing pretty well. Bear in mind that these struggles are part of the human condition. Try to be patient with yourself and your siblings.

Here are some suggestions to make time spent with your extended family more joyous this holiday season. First, focus on accepting, even celebrating, the differences between yourself and your siblings. Maybe your sister is a great cook, mother, or surgeon, but you must have your talents as well. Second, let go of your impulse to compete with, change, or fix your sibling. You'll be amazed at how much conflict can be eliminated by a conscious decision to disengage from old behaviors. To this end, it's helpful to consider how old baggage might be



Accept Differences

**Let Go of
Competition**

Gain Perspective

**Take the
High Road**

**Make Space
When Necessary**

clouding your judgment of current events. Third, learn to put your parents' opinions and behaviors into proper perspective. Is it really worth the emotional toll of envy that your father thinks your brother made the better career choice? Finally, focus your attention on personifying the type of family member you want to be. Tremendous satisfaction and peace of mind can be derived from knowing you are able to rise above the fray.

This said, some situations are excessively troubled and dysfunctional. In these cases, too much time together can simply be . . . too much. Consider limiting face time by getting a hotel room nearby or across town. It might be the best gift you give yourself this year.

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