



## SIBLING RIVALRY

Sibling rivalries lead to anxiety, depression and low self-esteem later in life but parents should let children fight it out to avoid causing further psychological damage.

A new study has claimed intervention by mothers and fathers can cause long-term emotional damage and found the best thing they can do is set clear household ground rules for their youngsters.

Nicole Campione-Barr, assistant professor of psychological science, at the University of Missouri, said: 'Although parents may be inclined to step in as arbiters, previous research has found that parents' interventions into adolescent sibling conflict can be detrimental.

'In concert with those prior findings, we believe our research suggests that setting household rules such as 'knock before entering a sibling's room', can be the best means for parents to resolve disputes and avoid appearing to play favourites.

'A calendar of chores and defined time limits for turns with a video game can help reduce conflicts. However, if a parent notes that one child consistently gets the short end of the stick, action should be taken to ensure one child isn't being too subordinate.'

A team at the U.S. university studied 145 pairs of European and American, middle-class siblings in their early teens over a year. The participants were asked about the frequency and intensity of their disputes.

They found quarrels could be grouped into two categories - equality and fairness, such as whose turn it is to do the washing up, or invasion of personal space, borrowing clothes without asking being a prime example.

The psychologists, whose findings are published in the *Child Development* journal, then looked at correlations between the teens' reported feelings of depression, anxiety and low self-esteem a year later.

Ms Campione-Barr said: 'Our results show that conflicts about violations of



personal space and property are associated with greater anxiety and lower self-esteem one year later.

'Conflicts over issues of equality and fairness are correlated to greater depression one year later.'

The results related to anxiety and self-esteem appeared to be more detrimental

for some siblings than others.

Younger brothers with older brothers, and girls with brothers had more anxiety, while teens in mixed-gender sibling pairs had lower self-esteem.

The study also warns parents to respect teenagers' need for privacy.

Ms Ciamone-Barr said: 'Although adolescents in some households may not have their own rooms, they still need some degree of respect for personal space from both parents and siblings.'

'For example, parents and siblings should respect the private nature of children's diaries.'

But the psychologist added that sometimes it is necessary for parents to step in, and said: 'If most sibling interactions become intense conflicts, a family should seek professional help, especially if violence is involved.'

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