

The Most Common Form of Family Violence: Sibling Aggression and Abuse

Corinna Jenkins Tucker, PhD, CFLE
Tanya Rouleau Whitworth, PhD
David Finkelhor, PhD

Crimes against Children Research Center
University of New Hampshire
Durham, NH, USA

DEFINITIONS

Rivalry: competition for or protests about parents’ or caregivers’ attention, favor, and resources (e.g., financial, time). As part of this competitive process, siblings may display jealousy and bicker, but without the intention to harm.

Aggression: the intention to cause physical or psychological harm to a sibling and includes hitting, attacking, denigrating, humiliating, and destroying possessions and property.

Abuse: an ongoing pattern of aggression or bullying by a sibling with more power that causes evident harm or a strong chance of harm. A serious one-time event can also be abuse.

Sexual abuse: sexual activities with a sibling that are unwanted or involve a considerable developmental or age difference.

STOPPING AGGRESSION AND ABUSE

Raise awareness and change perceptions (i.e., that sibling aggression is harmless, “just rivalry,” and ignorable).

Teach parents effective conflict mediation techniques.

Train professionals to screen for, recognize, and treat sibling aggression and abuse.

Provide trauma-informed care that takes a multi-systemic approach to the harmed child, the child who caused harm, and the family.

Add information about sibling aggression and abuse to family violence, anti-bullying, and parent education programs.

Classify sibling aggression as an adverse childhood experience (ACE).

ABOUT THE SAARA INITIATIVE

This initiative will increase awareness of sibling aggression, its pervasiveness, and its links to well-being. Our goal is to change the perception that sibling aggression is not serious and provide guidance about how to prevent and interrupt it. To that end, SAARA:

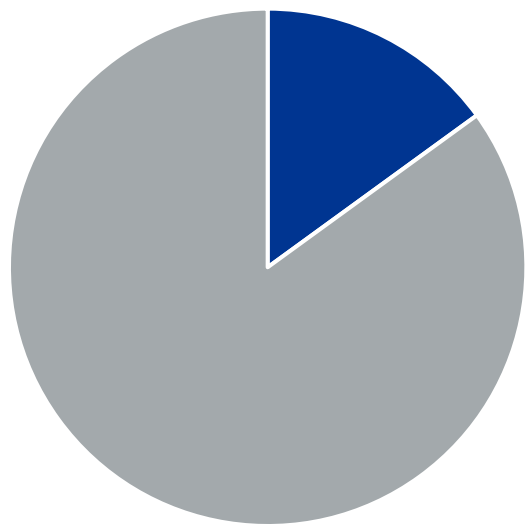
- Translates science for the media, public, parents, educators, and child protection, mental health, and medical professionals.
- Incorporates survivors’ voices and experiences.
- Offers workshops, trainings, and tools for parents and professionals.
- Aims to build a network and create systemic change.



One-third of children aged 0-17 experienced sibling victimization in the past year.

Four percent of children experienced severe physical sibling victimization in the past year.


Harms Associated with Sibling Aggression




Fifteen percent of children and adolescents are bullied by both peers and a sibling.

Chronic sibling victimization more than doubles the risk of peer bullying.


CONTACT US




UNH.SAARA@unh.edu



(603) 862-0936



www.unh.edu/ccrc/saara



@SAARAInitiative

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BARRIERS TO RECOGNITION

Sibling aggression is seen as less serious than other forms of family violence, dating violence, and peer bullying.

Sibling aggression is commonly perceived as normal, acceptable, or even beneficial (i.e., to make children tougher).

Aggressive and abusive behaviors between siblings are often dismissed as sibling rivalry by parents, professionals, and even the victimized sibling.

The lack of clear and widely-agreed definitions of sibling aggression and abuse creates confusion.

Professionals who work with children and families generally receive no relevant training or evidence-based guidelines.

There is a social and legal policy vacuum around sibling aggression and abuse.



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