Classification of Sibling of Dynamics

SAARA
unh.edu/saara

			Destructive Conflict		
	Rivalry	**Constructive Conflict**	**Mild Aggression**	**Severe Aggresion**	**Abuse**
One-sided or mutual?	One-sided or mutual	Mutual	One-sided or mutual	One-sided or mutual	One-sided with a power differential
Motivation / Reason	Competition for parental resources (e.g., attention, love, time, money)	Resolve a specific problem or disagreement	Anger, frustration, lack of social and emotional skills (possibly age-appropriate)	Anger, frustration, lack of social and emotional skills	Power and control, with or without an underlying issue (e.g., a compulsion, externalizing disorder, or trauma)
Description / Example Behaviors	May include comparisons, jealousy, competitions, and perceived favoritism	Siblings listen, empathize, problem-solve, and compromise	May include insults, pushing, and taking personal items	May include punching, kicking, ridiculing, and weapon-like object use	May include terrorizing, humiliating, sexual contact, and physical violence
Impacts / Outcomes	Siblings develop unique qualities, but unbalanced or too much rivalry can lead to aggression	Enhances relationship quality; siblings develop emotion regulation and prosocial skills	Possible emotional and relationship harm (without physical injuries)	Physical injuries, emotional harm, and/or relationship impacts	Serious and enduring physical, emotional, and/or sexual harm with estrangement likely

Tucker, Whitworth, & Finkelhor, Journal of Social and Personal Relationships (Vol. 42, Issue 7) pp. 1800-1817. © 2025 by The Author(s). Reprinted by Permission of Sage Publications.

Practice Recommendations for Sibling Dynamics

SAARA
unh.edu/saara

			Destructive Conflict		
	Rivalry	**Constructive Conflict**	**Mild Aggression**	**Severe Aggresion**	**Abuse**
Professional help needed?	No	No	No, but could be helpful	Strongly recommended	Yes
Advice	• Do not label siblings • Listen to children's concerns • Treat siblings fairly (may not be equally) • Value and spend time with each child • Praise when siblings get along	Begin teaching social and emotional skills to siblings in early childhood, including: • Managing emotions • Listening and empathizing • Conflict management • Compromise	• Model and teach constructive conflict and emotion regulation • Establish a family "no hitting" rule • Increase supervision, if possible	• Model and teach constructive conflict and emotion regulation • Establish a family "no hitting" rule • Increased supervision is strongly recommended	• Believe the harmed child • Seek professional help to establish and follow a safety plan • Ensure each sibling in the family receives support and therapy
Prevention and Intervention	Parent education on positive parenting, avoiding favoritism, and promoting positive sibling relationships	Parent education on effective techniques to promote constructive conflict (e.g., mediation)	Parent education on effective techniques to promote constructive conflict (e.g., mediation) and reduce aggression	Parent education; A therapeutic approach that explores each sibling's adjustment, the sibling relationship, and family dynamics may be necessary	Professional help is needed to address safety concerns, family dynamics, parenting, and all family members' mental health

Tucker, Whitworth, & Finkelhor, Journal of Social and Personal Relationships (Vol. 42, Issue 7) pp. 1800-1817. © 2025 by The Author(s). Reprinted by Permission of Sage Publications.