

Sibling Face-Off

by Tamekia Reece



We help make one of life's most confusing relationships easier to understand.

If you have a sister or a brother (or both), you know just how ... uh ... wacky the relationship can be. One minute your sister does something nice (covers for you when you get home a little late), and you're blown away by how wonderful she is. The next minute you're wishing she'd get out of your face and leave you alone. Regardless of whether you and your sibs are the best of pals or more like squabbling strangers, sibling relationships can be confusing. We've got the details on the whats, the whys, and how to deal.

'Because he's older ...'

Your brother gets a higher allowance, he has a later curfew, and he even gets to do things you don't! Of course, according to your parents, it's all because he's older. How unfair!

The Scoop: How much (and what) you get to do is based on not only your maturity level but also your level of responsibility, says James Crist, a psychologist and coauthor of *Siblings: You're Stuck with Each Other, so Stick Together*. Older sibs may get to do more, but they also often have more responsibilities (such as harder chores). If you want more privileges, show you're mature enough to handle them. Teens who make good decisions, keep up with schoolwork, and complete chores without needing frequent reminders may be allowed more freedom, Crist says.

'I'm telling Mom!'

Sometimes brothers and sisters are like paparazzi-always waiting to report every detail of your life.

The Scoop: "Younger siblings aren't as independent yet, so they tell parents everything," says Jeffrey Kluger, author of *The Sibling Effect: What the Bonds Among Brothers and Sisters Reveal About Us*. "They're also just learning what fairness means, so they can't resist ratting you out when they think you've been misbehaving." When an older brother or sister spills the beans, it may be to annoy you or to earn brownie points with your parents. If so, Kluger says, don't start snitching in retaliation unless you want a tattle battle. Instead, he suggests trying to talk it out and discuss how important privacy is to both of you.

Siblings aren't necessarily trying to get you into trouble when they report on you, either. Sometimes they get involved because they are concerned about your well-being. If your sister tells all when you've, say, been skipping school or are getting involved in an unhealthy relationship, try not to be mad and instead see where she's coming from.

'But he's the baby'

If Tyler W., 16, of Virginia, takes a short break while doing homework on the computer, his 14-year-old brother tells their mom. "She then comes and argues with me that I shouldn't be goofing off," Tyler says. He sometimes gets kicked off the computer. Yet, when Tyler's brother does the same exact thing, he receives only a short lecture and then gets to continue using the computer.

The Scoop: "Parents expect an older child to behave more maturely and be more responsible," Kluger says. In other words, your younger brother may get away with something that would cause you to be grounded for weeks.

If that kind of treatment really gets to you, talk to your parents. Crist suggests: "I feel pretty frustrated with how I get treated compared to my brother. It seems he gets away with a lot more than I do, and I don't understand why. What can I do differently?"

'Anything you can do, I can do better'

It never fails. You do something; your sister tries to do it better. She's always competing with you!

The Scoop: A little competition between siblings is normal, especially if parents, relatives, and teachers often make comparisons. However, if a brother or a sister is constantly in contest mode, it can cause hostility. To nix the competitiveness, avoid bragging too much and be willing to congratulate your sister on her accomplishments. If she sees you're happy for her, she'll most likely end the "outdo you" game.

'Me too!'

Kate G., 17, of Illinois, has four younger siblings who refuse to give her space. "When I have friends over, three of my siblings follow me around, trying to show off, which is embarrassing and annoying," she says.

The Scoop: Tagalong sibs are actually a compliment because their behavior means they think you're cool, Kluger says. That doesn't mean you don't deserve breathing room, however. "Ask your parents to explain you're growing up and won't always be able or willing to spend so much time with them," Kluger suggests.

Try positive attention as well. Being encouraging, giving compliments or even offering to play a game with your siblings can go a long way, Crist says.

Although the sibling relationship is filled with difficulties, don't take it for granted. Sure, siblings can sometimes be a pain and you may get into fights (a lot), but the brother-and-sister bond (or brother-and-brother bond or sister-and-sister bond) is like none other. So make sure you cherish it.

Your Birth Order and Personality

The jury is mostly out as to whether it's truly possible to predict someone's personality based on whether that person was born first, last, or in the middle, but sometimes the descriptions seem spot-on. Are any of the traits listed below true about you?

Firstborn:	Middle child:	Last born:	Only child:
confident	popular	affectionate	independent
hardworking	laid-back	outgoing	creative
controlling	rebellious	charming	mature
intelligent	peacekeeper	fun loving	well-spoken

How Siblings Help Your Love Life Later On

Growing up with a sibling of the opposite gender can have positive effects on your future romantic relationships, says Jeffrey Kluger, author of *The Sibling Effect: What the Bonds Among Brothers and Sisters Reveal About Us*.

How? "Kids who grow up with an opposite-sex sibling tend to have a better sense of what the other gender wants, they understand how to have a conversation with the opposite sex, and they're more comfortable spending time with the other gender," he explains. So all the years you spend interacting with your brother or sister may come in handy!

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What does the author mean when she says siblings can be like the paparazzi?

- A. They take photos of you doing all kinds of things and then share them publicly.
- B. They're always documenting your actions and sharing them with others.
- C. They're in your face all the time, constantly pestering you and annoying you.
- D. None of the above

2. The author explains how some sibling pairs have the "me too!" problem in which one sibling always wants to tag along. What does she propose is the solution to this?

- A. Talk to your parents and ask them to explain to your sibling that sometimes you need and want some privacy with your friends.
- B. Give your sibling positive attention, and don't just always yell at them to get away.
- C. Both of the above
- D. None of the above

3. Which of the following conclusions about sibling relationships is supported by the passage?

- A. Siblings face many problems and challenges with one another, and these always lead to altercations.
- B. You shouldn't fight or get annoyed with your siblings.
- C. Each sibling relationship is different, so you really can't draw many conclusions.
- D. They are undoubtedly challenging, but also special and wonderful.

4. Read the following sentences and answer the question below: "However, if a brother or a sister is constantly in contest mode, it can cause hostility. To nix the competitiveness, avoid bragging too much and be willing to congratulate your sister on her accomplishments."

What does the word **hostility** mean?

- A. peace or truce
- B. anger or conflict
- C. comparisons or competitiveness
- D. abuse

5. The primary purpose of this passage is to describe
- A. the challenges involved with sibling relationships as well as potential solutions
 - B. all the types of fights siblings tend to have with one another during their childhoods
 - C. why birth order matters, and what your birth order says about your personality traits
 - D. what parents should do to help alleviate some of the challenges and potential fights that siblings have
6. How might your older brother or sister feel about getting a later curfew or larger allowance than you (assuming you're the younger sibling)?
7. What does James Crist suggest you should do if you want more privileges?
8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

_____ younger siblings try to show off in front of their older siblings' friends, older siblings get annoyed when younger siblings follow them around when they have friends over.

- A. So
- B. Because
- C. But
- D. In contrast

9. Which group of people generally has a curfew?



10. Who normally has an earlier curfew--the older sibling or younger sibling? Why?