

# Raising Kind Siblings



by Nicole Black

Coffee and Carpool: Raising Kind Kids

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# Ready to Raise Kinder Siblings?

So you want to raise kinder kids.

*Me too.*

But one of the trickiest parts of teaching our kids to be kinder is reminding them to be kind to their siblings.

Our kids tend to save their less than savory behavior for when they're home with their family.

They were on their best behavior all day and they come home and dump on us or worse, **dump on their siblings.**

And the bickering, fighting, and meanness cannot only grate on our nerves, it can also **break our hearts.**

Because when our kids are mean to each other, it's so hard to watch.

So we *actively and on purpose teach our kids to be kinder to their siblings.*

And when we use these strategies, we see the meanness fade and more and more kind actions pop up in our home.

Which will lead to a **calmer, happier, more peaceful home that we all want to be a part of.**

*But it starts with raising kinder siblings.*

So let's do this...

*Nicole*

# ABOUT Nicole Black



I am a recovering elementary school teacher, a mom to three super busy kids, and I mostly survive on strong coffee.

I help busy parents intentionally raise kind kids with simple yet meaningful ideas so our kids become the best version of themselves.

# It Is Possible to Teach Our Kids to Be Kinder to Their Siblings

*Would you like a sip of lemonade before I finish it?*

*What show do you want to watch? It's your turn to pick.*

*Here, you can use my eraser.*

*I'm getting juice. Would you like a cup?*

What's so miraculous about these simple statements?

Well first, they're kind. Just **everyday, normal statements that are kind.**

Second, they were said by kids. And unprompted kind statements from children make my heart leap because it's getting a peek into their little sweet, giving souls.

But most importantly, they were said by **one of my kids to another one of my kids.**

I heard it with my own ears: my kids were being kind to their siblings without prompts, without reminders, or without "the mom look."

And I wanted to throw a party.

Because all the effort and all the reminders and all our discussions on kindness are working. It's sinking in.

Now does it work all the time? Are my kids kind to their siblings every time, every day? Are they perfect?

To quote my son, "*Nope. Not even close.*"

**But genuine, real acts of kindness are popping up in my house and happening without prompting, reminding, or cajoling my children.**

And they're happening more often.

But these quiet and simple moments of kindness didn't happen by magic or by crossing my fingers.

**Raising kind kids takes work.**

Raising kids who are kind to their siblings takes even harder work.

It takes on purpose, intentional parenting to ensure my children remember to be kinder to everyone, but especially to their siblings.

**Because I want our home to be a safe haven for my kids so when they come home, they can let their hair down, let their guard down, and just be themselves.**

In order for that to happen, my kids have to want to be here and they have to want to be with their family. And that includes their siblings.

So we often focus on building a **stronger sibling bond** between our kids. Because when my kids feel connected, **we are a stronger family.**

And we are a better family.



## Why It's Crucial My Kids Are Kind to Each Other

I want my kids to be kind to their siblings for a myriad of reasons.

I want them to enjoy being together.

I want them to *-gasp-* be friends with each other.

I want them to create a strong relationship now that will carry them through into adulthood.

And I want a more peaceful home.

We live in a small house. My kids share rooms. They share toys. They share our space.

And I hear everything. I'm around all their interactions and I'm party to all their disagreements due to the thinness of our walls.

So besides the fact that I genuinely and truly want them to be kind people, and I want them to have positive interactions with their siblings, **I also don't want to be living with and surrounded daily by unkind little people who shriek mean things at each other.**

But since they're siblings and they live in tight quarters with people who push their buttons, the meanness can come out.

They've been on their best behavior all day long at school and soccer practice and on the playground.

So when they get home, they're often tired and cranky and they take it out on the people nearest them: their siblings.

So please don't think for one second that it's all sunshine and rainbows around here.

**We're shooting for genuine, real, chose-to-be-kind-because-they-wanted-to interactions.**

And those simply don't happen all the time.

But I'll tell you what. They're happening more often. It's becoming more of a go-to reaction for my kids.

Which proves it's working.

And we often hear about how kids *should* be kind.

But we rarely talk about the why.

Why should kids be kind to classmates? to friends? to their siblings?

There are a million reasons why and I can talk about it all day long.

But we can simplify it for our kids and make it something they can internalize.

For our younger kids, one of the simplest ways to explain the importance of kindness is to frame it in terms of what's in it for them: **How being kind to others will actually help our kids.**

Science has proven that young children's brains are wired to be self-centered when they are young, so children struggle to put themselves in other people's shoes and imagine how other people feel.

So with their brain development in mind, we can **use these three ideas to explain why they should be kind to their siblings.** Which will help them remember to be kind even when they don't feel like it:

## 1. Being kind feels good.

**Acts of kindness towards others improves our mood.** When we feel good, and do good, and act with goodness, our dopamine levels in our brains increase and we want to do more good.

The dopamine makes us happier and our bodies want more dopamine. So then we want to be kind again. Which creates more dopamine, which makes us even happier. And the pattern continues...

### *TRY IT NOW:*

When your child does something kind, ask them: *"How did being kind make you feel?"*

They will **begin to associate happy feelings with their kind actions.** And over time, they'll want to replicate it.

## 2. When you're kind, kindness will find you back.

Call it karma or *The Secret* or good juju, but kindness will eventually find us if we are truly kind to others. It may not find our kids right this minute when their sibling is treating them unkindly, but it will come.

### *TRY IT NOW:*

When you see one of your kids being kind to their sibling point it out. Praise it.

And because it can be easy to forget, **remind your kids that others are kind to them often**. And now it's their job to keep being kind so kindness keeps on "finding them."

## 3. We can **build up our kids' emotional intelligence** when we label and discuss how our kids feel and offer suggestions to regulate their emotions.

When our kids are mad, irritated, or frustrated with their siblings, we can give them the tools they need to calm down *before* they respond to a situation.

If they calm down first and then respond, **their response will be more measured and more controlled and more kind** than if they respond "in the heat of the moment."

### *TRY IT NOW:*

When you see your child getting mad or irritated, offer them ways to calm down. They can try any calm down technique that works for them.

Some ideas to try include: slowly counting to ten, taking deep breaths, thinking three happy thoughts, or using essential oils to calm down.

Once they're calm, they can then respond and communicate with their brother or sister who made them mad or frustrated.

Those few seconds or minutes will lessen their fight or flight response, and their knee-jerk reaction to retaliate with meanness will be lessened.

## Teaching Kids How to Be Kind is NOT a One-Time Event

Wouldn't it be great if we told our kids to do something one time, and they magically did it? For the rest of their lives?

Sadly, that's not how parenting works. My kids still leave their shoes by the front door.

Sometimes it feels like the more important the lesson we need to teach our kids, the longer it takes for them to really get it.

So like all things, **teaching our kids to be kind takes time.**

It takes repetition.

And it also takes patience to help our children learn to think of others, to place themselves in someone else's shoes, and to choose to be helpful.

We have to "**rewire**" our kids' brains and throw some positive "**brainwashing**" in so **kindness becomes their knee-jerk reaction.** So it becomes their go-to response. And it feels natural to them.

But this whole process of teaching our kids to be kinder to their siblings can take longer than we want it to.

Because **in the process of intentionally, and on purpose raising kind kids, it's not always going to be easy or simple.**

I've heard in my house, (said with the most attitude and saltiness you can conjure):

*I'll be kind if you're kind.*

*You're not being kind to me so I'm not going to be kind to you.*

*Why should I be kind to her? She's so mean.*

*No, you can't use it. STOP TOUCHING MY STUFF!* (shrieked at an ear piercing level)

Listen, I'm not expecting perfection from my kids.

But I do expect them to be getting kinder to their siblings over time.

So keep in mind, almost as a disclaimer, teaching our kids about kindness is **not a one-time conversation.**

None of these concepts can be explained to a child only once.

These teachable moments need to be on constant repeat.

You will become a broken record. Which is okay, because this is one message you want them to hear often.

And over time, it will sink in.

**Kindness will eventually become their inner voice guiding their actions**, even when they don't really feel like being kind.

And as our kids get older we can begin to teach them other reasons for being kind that expand past themselves: that being kind improves the other person's day and makes their life better, happier or easier- even just for a minute.

Because focusing on others and interacting with their siblings in positive ways will make our families stronger and calmer and more peaceful.

But for now, we **focus on our kids and their me-centered minds**.

So when we hear the common cry, *"But she's not being kind to me,"* or *"I'll be kind when he's kind"* or *"Why should I be nice to her if she's so mean?"* we just hug our kids.

We can **tell them it's hard to remember to be kind when others aren't**. Because it really is hard, even for grown-ups.

And when they've calmed down and are ready to really hear us and our message *yet again*, we can remind them that even when others are unkind, it's their job to stay kind.

Because that's who they really are inside their heart: **kind little people on the path to being kind adults**.

They just need the reminder.

*Over and over again.*

We talked about the why.

Now it's time to dive in to the how so you can make it happen in your home.

# Make "Be Kind" One of Your Only Two Family Rules

Raising kind kids is so important, we've made it one of our only two family rules.

Because our kids **hear only snippets** of what we say, instead of a ton of rules on a long list, we've narrowed all of rules down to only two family rules.

*Just two.*

They're easy to remember. And they're easy to talk about.

And more importantly, they're **simple to follow**.

When I drop my kids off at school or a birthday party, or a playdate, I remind them of our family rules.

When we walk into a library, or a place of worship, or a restaurant, I **remind them of our family rules**.

And it takes less than 10 seconds.

All three of my kids can tell you our two family rules and explain them anytime you ask.

Do they always follow them?

Sadly, no. That part is a work in progress.

But they know what we expect of them.

Because these two rules cover everything and we talk about them all the time:

## 1. Be Kind

## 2. First Time Listening

Now before you get skeptical that these two rules can really replace the long list of rules you may want your kids to follow, let's break it down.

## Be Kind Rule:

The "Be Kind Rule" covers everything that involves how our kids **interact with the world, their friends, and their family.**

The "Be Kind Rule" covers:

- teasing,
- ignoring me or siblings,
- physical hurting of any kind,
- turn-taking or sharing,
- helping someone,
- thinking of others,
- not hurting feelings on purpose,
- offering compliments and being thoughtful
- kind sibling interactions,
- including siblings in play or activities,
- standing up for siblings,
- using manners: *please, thank you, no thank you, you're welcome, excuse me, and bless you*
- "bad" words or profanity,
- back talk
- sarcasm
- mean words or mean tone

It really encompasses all things to **make my kids better, kinder people** whom others would enjoy being around. Me included.

## First Time Listening Rule:

First Time Listening is the act of **hearing me say something and listening the first time--before I have to say it again.**

It applies to everything from putting on your shoes in the morning, to no screens without permission, to helmets are not an option when bike riding.

More importantly, it works for things I **repeat ad nauseam** and am frankly tired of saying. These are the rules that keep them safe, and make them easier to live with.

Anything you **tell your kids to do or ask your kids to do** falls into this category.

And that's it. Only two rules. Simple and to the point. And **easy enough for a toddler and a hormonal tween to remember.**

# Help Your Kids Connect Rather Than Resent

We want our kids to be kind to their siblings. To choose to be kind. To realize it feels good to be kind.

But kids won't want to be kind to people they genuinely dislike.

So to **ensure my kids actually like each other, we spend time creating strong sibling relationships.**

We diffuse jealousy and competition *and* increase their collaboration and sense of being in a "club" together...a siblings club.

Want to help your kids connect with each other as siblings and **avoid resentment, jealous tendencies, and an overall annoyance with their siblings?**

Here are powerful ways to help your kids connect with each other and create positive sibling relationships:

## 1. Don't require your kids to share:

Sharing is way too grown up of a concept for young kids to grasp. They will learn how to share with modeling and positive reinforcement over time.

Instead of sharing, we teach our kids to take turns, and it works like magic.

They know how to **ask for a turn politely** and how to take turns with things they really want like holding the buzzer at restaurants, choosing the next song Alexa plays, and who gets to use the blue crayon.

It's as simple as teaching them this phrase: "*Can I please have a turn when you're done?*"

And my kids are not required to share or turn take with things that are extra special to them like birthday gifts or lovies.

They can put those "specials" away somewhere safe to feel ownership over things that are extra important to them.

And this one shift has **eliminated 50% of the sibling squabbles in our home.**

## 2. Have multiples of favorite toys when possible:

Since our kids are close in age, they often want to play with the same toys at the same time.

One simple fix, especially if you have toddlers and preschoolers, is to have **multiples of their absolute favorite toys**. We have multiple puzzles, buckets of chalk and crayons and markers with duplicate colors, and many balls.

We have Duplo Legos coming out of our ears.

They won't have to turn take as often when there's two or three of a coveted item.

This obviously won't work with larger items or more expensive toys. But two sets of play car keys is worth it.

## 3. Be mindful of how you speak about, and to your kids in front of their siblings:

The book *Siblings Without Rivalry* guided how my husband and I speak about our kids and to our kids in front of each other to avoid jealousy and rivalry.

One of the two tips it helped us with was to avoid labels and to save the praise for private.

When we talk to our kids and tell them things like *"You're so athletic,"* our other kids hear, *"She's athletic, so I must not be."*

If I tell my son he's incredibly artistic, my daughters hear, *"He's artistic so I'm not artistic."*

Obviously, that's not what we're saying at all, but **that's what kids often hear**.

And the damage is done.

So we **praise them and tell them why we're proud of them out of earshot of our other kids**. It's a private moment for us to connect.

And we take a moment and pull each of them aside to tell them their drawings are so detailed and we love the colors they chose, and their soccer game was on point and we love their hustle, and the new story they're writing is so creative and we can't wait to read more... but we do it quietly.

#### 4. Give your kids a spot to be alone:

Most kids need a room, a spot, or a safe space to call their own.

This is especially true if you are raising an introvert or a kiddo who needs downtime to recharge. But even my little extrovert requires a space that is hers and hers alone to **retreat to when she's tired of being with her siblings.**

When we had a big house, all of my kids had their own room, so it was easy to find alone time.

Now that we're back in our smaller home and my kids share a room, we've had to get creative.

We've made a reading and drawing nook in a closet, hung up curtains around a bunk bed to offer up "privacy," and have created a hiding spot under some tall bushes for my son.

It's their spot to go to when they're not wanting to spend time with their siblings.

And it **recharges them so they're ready to interact and play together later.**

Plus it gives them a sense of ownership in our home that solidifies their feelings of belonging here.



## 5. Eliminate superlative language:

Another way to avoid hurt feelings is to avoid “best,” “better,” “worst,” and words that end in -er or -est. Avoiding these superlatives **eliminates a comparison game and a need to one-up each other.**

*I’m the fastest. I’m the best dancer. I’m the prettiest. I’m smarter.*

Kids can be fast without being the fastest.

They can be a good dancer without needing to proclaim themselves to be the best.

They can be smart without being smarter than their sibling.

The superlatives turns things into a competition. And competitions have a winner and a loser.

And the "loser" rarely feels good about it.

## 6. Connect with each child individually:

Kids who **feel secure in their relationships with their parents won’t feel the need to compete with their siblings to get their parents’ attention and affection.**

To really connect with each of our kids, we often go on dates with each of them.

We grab ice cream, or hot cocoa, or popcorn at Target.

We take them to the movies or to the batting cages, or to the mall.

It doesn't matter where or how you spend time together with one of your kids.

When we carve out time to spend alone time with them, our kids will feel valued and important and have no need to compete with each other when we get back home.

### *TRY IT NOW:*

On your calendar, plan a date with each of your kids and let them choose what you do or where you go.

## 7. Have family meetings and let the kids make decisions:

Not all decisions are up for a discussion. But when my husband and I can, we let our kids decide.

Especially when the decision directly affects them or they will perceive our decision on their behalf as being “unfair.”

Maybe they get to decide what we do on a rainy Saturday.

Or they get to pick the game on family game night.

Or they choose who gets snuggle time first.

The other day, my three kids worked out who would have the first, second, and third sleepover at their grandparents’ house without bickering or complaining. They logically talked through it and came up with a mutual agreement.

And I got to avoid being the bad guy to the two kids who had to wait their turn.



## 8. Let them work out their squabbles if they're doing it with kindness:

All siblings are going to bicker and have squabbles. It's okay if they get mad and frustrated or annoyed with each other.

**Voicing their frustrations and then figuring out how to work it out is part of growing up and learning how to interact, live, and work with other people.**

I give my kids time to share their feelings and even bicker. I don't come running when I hear the start of a squabble. I hang back in the wings and see if they're able to work things out.

I step in when my kids' anger and frustration morphs into mean and unkind words or dangerous actions or I can see one child has more "power" than the other and is taking advantage of their sibling.



## 9. Ensure they listen to each other:

In an effort to make living in a small house together easier, my kids have to listen to each other's requests.

*Please stop singing.*

*Please turn down your music.*

*Please get off my bed.*

When **kids feel listened to and therefore respected, they're not going to feel like they need to raise their voice or get mad to get heard.**

This especially applies to honoring "stop" and "no" requests. If they're roughhousing, playing, or tickling each other, "stop" means "stop." And "no more" means "no more."

Even if it's said through fits of giggles.

## 10. Help them deal with *perceived* unfairness:

A lot of sibling issues come from **resentment towards a sibling when something feels "unfair."**

My eldest does more chores than her younger sister and therefore thinks this is unfair.

I have to remind her that when she was 6 she did one chore, just like her sister does now.

My youngest has to turn out her lights sooner than her older siblings which she feels is "unfair."

I have to remind her often when they were her age, they had to turn off their lights earlier, and when she's older she can read longer.

It's not going to be even or equal all the time, but that doesn't make it unfair.

## 11. Make Sibling Books

When my second was born, my eldest wasn't too impressed. She didn't *not* like her new brother, but she wasn't interested in him either. She didn't want to help or hold him or interact at all.

So we made her a Sibling Book and it fast became a treasured item in our home because it **helped her connect with her brother**.

It reminded her just how much they have in common. And how much fun they have when they are together.

This sibling book worked so well, I made another set of Sibling Books after my third kiddo was born.

Directions to make the Sibling Books are at the end of this ebook.



# Connect as a Family

Kids who feel they don't fit into their family or have to compete for love, attention, and respect will be **unlikely to show kindness to anyone in their family.**

So, when we take the time to build a strong family identity, our kids will feel secure in their place in our family.

And when **kids feel emotionally safe and like they really belong, they will let their guard down and not feel like they need to compete, elbows out, with anyone they live with for what they need.**

They will have no reason not to be kind.

There are tons of ways to **feel connected** and create a strong family identity.

Here are a few of the ways we come together to foster our closeness:

## 1. Family Traditions

We have an obscene number of traditions in my family for every holiday and special occasion.

One of my favorite family traditions is on birthdays. We serve breakfast in bed for the birthday person, with a breakfast of their choice.

And then we all climb into bed with them while they open presents and eat their breakfast.

**Traditions connect us through time**, both to past generations who started the tradition and to future generations as they continue the tradition.

Knowing that this is what we do in our family **makes us a more cohesive unit.** Plus I get bagels and coffee in bed on my birthday.

### *TRY IT NOW:*

Make a list of your family traditions. Which ones do you love? Is there a new tradition you can start that would help your family connect more?

## 2. Family Rituals

We also have family rituals, little things we do every day or week that **connects us to each other**.

Some are consistent, some we do whenever we have a few extra minutes, and some we "surprise" the kids with.

We:

- have Taco Tuesdays,
- have Pizza Fridays,
- drink Shirley Temples on holidays,
- eat breakfast for dinner,
- sing a special song at bedtime,
- make banana pancakes or waffles on the weekends,
- say a special goodbye when we drive away,
- have a silly way to snuggle in bed,
- eat picnic dinners at the beach,
- walk to get Slurpees on super hot days,
- go on family walks at sunset, and
- get donuts on cold mornings.



### 3. Family Date Night

Whenever we have a free evening with no planned activities, we go on a **family date night**.

Our preferred choice happens to be visiting a used bookstore to find our next favorite book and eating ice cream.

It's a simple way to get everyone **excited to spend quality time together**.

But family date night is anything that qualifies as fun for your family:

- roller skating,
- going to the movies,
- family game night,
- jacuzzi or swimming at night,
- attending a sporting event,
- eating dinner at our favorite restaurant,
- or roaming the aisles of Target together.



## 4. Family Song

We have a family song that whenever we hear it, no matter what we're doing, we all squeal or whoop and start dancing, singing, or both.

We all love this song and play it often because it's a **one-way ticket to a better mood for all of us.**

Choose a song that works for all of you and your personalities. It can be upbeat and fun or slow and sweet.

Dance to it in your kitchen after breakfast or before bedtime.

Request it at family weddings.

Play it on road trips.

Our song is Megan Trainor's *Better When I'm Dancing*, but we also "have" to play Jack Johnson's *Banana Pancakes* song when we're making our family's banana pancakes.

Feel free to borrow our song or come up with your own.

## 5. Family Hobby

Finding a family hobby that you all love to do will **encourage everyone to want to spend more time together.**

It can be tricky when there is a wide age range and different abilities or interests, but try out different things until you find what works.

Maybe it's game night or building puzzles or creating with Legos. Maybe it's going for a hike or camping or flying kites. Or maybe it's bike riding, shooting hoops, or playing frisbee golf.

It really doesn't matter what it is as long as everyone's involved and having fun.

### *TRY IT NOW:*

Carve out a day on your calendar to do something you all love to do. And then protect it from other commitments.

## 6. Secret Family Handshake

We have a secret family handshake that we give each other when we're walking together, saying goodbye to each other, or saying goodnight to each other.

I could tell you what it is, but I've **been sworn to secrecy by my family**.

But I'll give you a hint.

It involves squeezing their hand a certain number of times to let them know that I love them. And then they respond with a certain number of squeezes that they love me too.

And because it's a "**secret**" **only our family knows, it feels extra special to be in the know**.

*TRY IT NOW:*

Ask your family to come up with a "secret" family handshake that only you know. Then start using it.

## 7. Family TV Shows/Movie

Find a family TV show or movie that you enjoy to watch together. Screen time can be divisive, or it can bring you all together.

If you're talking about the show, cheering on your favorite team, or rooting for someone in a competition show, **screen time can bring everyone together**.

It can be tricky to find one show that everyone enjoys, especially if there's a wide age range.

Our family show used to be *Mickey Mouse ClubHouse*. Now that we're out of the toddler days, we've **upgraded to something my husband and I actually enjoy watching too**.

My kids' current favorites that my husband and I also enjoy are *Paradise Run*, *Keep It Spotless*, *Cake Wars*, *Kid Baking Championship*, *America's Got Talent*, *House Hunters*, *Tiny House Nation*, *Ninja Warrior* and *Fixer Upper* (my kids are suckers for Chip's shenanigans).

## 8. Inside Jokes

We have a couple favorite family jokes that we love to tell over and over again. And they've **slowly become our family inside jokes because we've all told them so many times.**

They don't surprise us since we obviously know the punchline, but we all laugh each time anyway.

And when my kids are laughing, they're having fun together. Which furthers their connection.

Our favorite family jokes:

*Knock, knock*

*Who's there?*

Interrupting cow.

*Interuptting c---*

*MOOOOOOOO.*

-----

*Knock knock.*

*Who's There?*

*Cows go.*

*Cows go who?*

*No, cows go 'moooooo.'*

-----

*What did the janitor say when he jumped out of the closet?*

*Supplies!!!*

## 9. Family Bucket List

To spend more quality time together rather than staring at each other and asking every Saturday morning, "Well, what do you want to do today?" we **created a Family Bucket List**.

[Want Ideas On How to Create a Family Bucket List? Click here.](#)

We printed out the free printable and sat down to have a family meeting to fill it out.

We brainstormed and decided what things we want to try, visit, do, create and explore.

A few things on our list:

- Visit a U-Pick farm and pick strawberries
- Learn how to make strawberry jam
- Hike up to the Hollywood sign
- Find a waterfall
- Have an overnight in our own backyard

Now our weekends are spent together more often, **creating fun memories as we try new things**.



## Talk About Kindness Often

Now that we've laid the ground work so our kids have no reason to not be kind, now we need to focus on **encouraging them to be kind**. Teaching them to be kind.

So, simple enough, the first place we start is to talk about kindness often.

We point it out when we're watching TV shows and movies together.

We talk about kindness in the car and around the dinner table and when we tuck them into bed.

And we use [these 60 Discussion Starters](#) to start conversations about **being a good friend, being a helper, being mindful of others, and including others**.



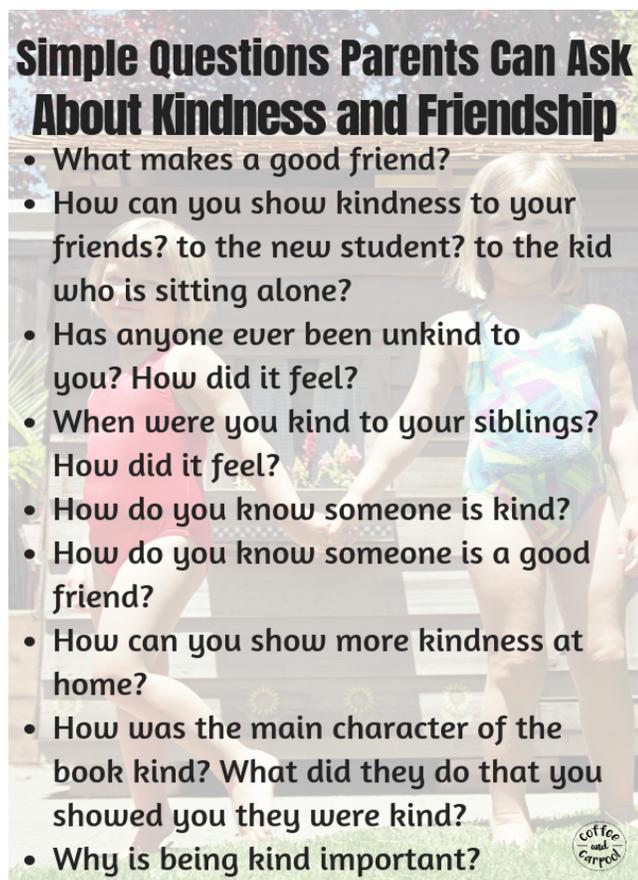
We also **talk about kindness when we read books.**

We praise characters who act and speak with kindness. We give extra praise when the book characters are kind to their siblings (*why are those characters so darn hard to find?*)

And on the flipside, when we read a book with an unkind character, we use that to talk about their unkind actions or words and what we could do differently.

To fill your bookshelf with [books about kindness](#), [click here](#) to see some of our family favorites.

And use these discussion starters to help guide the conversation about kindness along:



**Simple Questions Parents Can Ask About Kindness and Friendship**

- What makes a good friend?
- How can you show kindness to your friends? to the new student? to the kid who is sitting alone?
- Has anyone ever been unkind to you? How did it feel?
- When were you kind to your siblings? How did it feel?
- How do you know someone is kind?
- How do you know someone is a good friend?
- How can you show more kindness at home?
- How was the main character of the book kind? What did they do that you showed you they were kind?
- Why is being kind important?

Coffee and Curried

## Model Kindness and Teach Mindfulness of Others

Our kids are watching and listening to our every move. So if we want to raise kind kids, **we ourselves need to be kind to others.**

We need to offer someone to cut in front of us in the grocery line when they have one thing and we have 100. We need to hold the door open for the people behind us. We need to help our neighbors bring in their trash cans and newspapers.

**We need to show our kids how to be considerate and mindful of others around them.**

Because our kids are watching.

They will emulate us. They will do what we do. So we must act with kindness and be mindful of those around us.

Being considerate and mindful of others does not mean giving up your needs or putting others before yourself all the time.

It's also *not* bending over backward in life and being a pushover. We absolutely shouldn't let people take advantage of us or our kindness.

Instead, being considerate and mindful of others is about **paying attention and seeing others--really seeing them--and realizing that our needs are not more important than their needs.**

Being considerate and mindful of others is taking the time to **think of others** and recognize what might make their life easier or simpler or more enjoyable.

My favorite ways to teach kids to be considerate and mindful of others are pointing out the little things.

Because it's the **little things in life that make up the majority of our interactions with other people** so they can have the greatest impact.

## Being considerate and mindful of others is:

- looking behind you when you're leaving a store or restaurant to see if you need to keep holding the door open for the person who is right behind you
- staying to the right on sidewalks, in stairwells, and in passageways so others can walk past you comfortably
- not taking up more space in public areas than you need
- moving your bag off a chair so someone can sit
- noticing the person behind you in line is buying one thing, but you have a cartful and letting them go first
- offering your mail carrier, garbage collector or gardener cold water on a hot day
- keeping your feet off of chairs in public spaces like buses, restaurants and movie theaters.
- offering to refill someone else's drink when you stand up to refill yours
- giving up your seat on public transport or while waiting to someone else who clearly needs to sit more than you do
- covering your sneeze and cough to not spread the germs
- not hoarding all the supplies or materials when working in a group
- tucking in your legs when someone is passing you in a narrow aisle
- putting away your things from the common areas in your house
- avoid blocking the aisle so others can easily pass
- asking if anyone else wants the last of the food and offering to split it with them
- not leaving your shoes in the middle of the entryway or hallways
- busing your own table at restaurants where it's appropriate to do so
- standing back away from an elevator so people can exit easier
- patiently waiting your turn in line because others were there before you
- being appropriately quiet in public spaces like libraries, houses of worship, waiting rooms, movie theaters, and on public transportation
- asking if you can change the TV channel or song when other people are listening or watching before changing it

**These "little things" that may seem unimportant or insignificant on their own add up to big things. And showing someone consideration can make or break their day.**

We can teach our kids to be more mindful of others in 3 simple ways:

## 1. Model the desired behaviors:

We can model all of these behaviors, all the time, every day.

**Our kids will see us making the kind choice.** Because they're watching our every move.

We can stand up and give our seat to the pregnant mama.

We can hold the door open for those near us.

And we can let the guy with only a carton of milk go in front of us at the grocery store.

Besides it being good karma and considerate of others, our kids will see us **practice what we preach.**

*TRY IT NOW:*

Look around you and purposefully notice where you can help someone, then do it.

## 2. Explicitly teach them:

There are so many things we have to teach our kids how to do. Chew with your mouth closed. Hold my hand in the parking lot. Clothes are not optional in public spaces.

So we've added teaching them to be considerate and mindful of others to that list.

When we're walking somewhere, I'm constantly repeating: "*Stay to the right*" as we pass someone and "*hold the door for the person behind you*" as we're exiting a building and "*back up please,*" as the elevator arrives at our level.

We remind our kids so often, it will **eventually become second nature to them** and they'll do these things without even thinking about it.

### 3. Point out behaviors that are not considerate or mindful of others:

When we see someone being inconsiderate in public, **we quietly point it out to our children and discuss what to do instead that could be more considerate or mindful of others.**

We come up with several ideas because there's rarely only one kind way to act.

And we point out the negative behavior on TV shows, in movies and in books and talk about why it wasn't considerate or kind.

Listen, we're not all going to always be mindful of others.

It can be easy to forget...**especially when we're in a hurry, distracted, or in a bad mood.**

Are we always mindful of others when we're stuck in traffic or at the mall during the December rush?

Not always.

And it can also be easy to forget when we're super anxious about something concerning our children...

But by modeling and teaching considerate behaviors, like waiting our turn to talk to someone, or offering up our seat, or offering to help when someone is hurt, it allows **someone else to be more comfortable at almost no discomfort to us.**

And that's something we can all aim for.



# Ban These Things for Kinder Siblings

While we're explicitly teaching our kids to be kind, we have also **banned these 13 things to enable us to have a kind home.**

These 13 things may seem trivial or too small to be deemed important. And we all know that as parents, we have to choose our battles.

But when we add these things up, day after day, these 13 things **change the dynamic of our home.**

These seemingly little things change the tone of our whole house. They change how we speak to each other and how we treat each other.

So even though they may seem trivial, **when it comes to kindness and trying to raise kind kids, the little things matter.**

And we want our kids' home--our home--to be a place we all want to be.

We want **our home to be a place where our kids feel safe to be themselves** without getting ridiculed for it.

A place where our kids can let their hair down and be their best, truest selves without relentless teasing by their siblings.

A place where there is mutual respect and kindness amongst siblings and between kids and adults.

Because we **want our kids to not simply survive their childhoods, but to thrive during their childhoods.**

It's not easy to ban some of these things, but for our family, it has been a game changer in the way we talk to each other, interact with each other, and live together.

## 1. Sarcasm

Sarcasm can be funny. It can be amusing. But it can also be **incredibly hurtful**.

When my kids were younger it was easy to not use sarcasm. No two year old would understand it.

But now that we have a tween daughter, it slips in every once in a while. And she calls me out on it every time. And I'm grateful she does because when I'm using sarcasm, I'm not in a good place.

I'm usually frustrated, angry, or really tired. So I back up, apologize, and rephrase my comment without sarcasm.

And it takes away the meanness in my tone and meaning.

## 2. Name-Calling and Put-Downs

This one seems obvious, but name-calling goes hand in hand with labeling our kids' behaviors.

When my six-year-old cheats during a family board game, instead of calling her a "*cheater*" we tell her she's cheating at the game and it's not fair to everyone else.

Instead of calling my daughter a "*liar*" when I catch her in a full blown lie, I tell her that she's lying and not being honest and I won't be able to trust what she says until she tells the truth all the time.

We **focus on the behavior we want to change rather than name-calling and labeling**.

## 3. Teasing

Teasing can be good-natured and fun.

But it can be taken too far in a very short period of time.

And since everyone's threshold for what they are okay with is different, the line between funny and hurtful can be blurry.

**Teasing can quickly cause someone to put up a wall to emotionally protect themselves.**

Comments followed with an *"I was just kidding"* or comments that start with *"No offense, but..."* lead to nowhere positive.

Being teased when she sings off key prevents my daughter from singing in front of us in the future.

Being teased when she likes a boy keeps my daughter from telling us about it.

Being teased about picky eating keeps my son from trying new foods.

Teasing **hurts feelings** and there's usually no upside to it.

#### 4. Dismissing how hard something is

My kids will often write off their younger siblings' struggles and frustrations with a flippant, *"Oh, but that's so easy."*

So I remind my kids it's easy for them now that they know how to do it.

Because it wasn't easy when they first tried it.

Reading is easy for my second grader, but I have to remind him when he was in Kindergarten like his sister is now, it wasn't so easy.

It's **unkind to dismiss someone else who is struggling with a new skill.**

A kinder comment would be, *"You just don't know how to do it yet,"* or *"It'll be easier when you keep practicing."*

#### 5. Ignoring or "Not Hearing" Each Other

This may just be me, but being ignored makes my blood boil.

I really can't handle the **disrespect and disregard that comes with being ignored.**

So I don't allow my kids to ignore each other.

If they don't want to participate in the conversation or need alone time, they have to say, *"I'm not ready to talk,"* or *"I need to be left alone."*

But they still have to respond with something. Anything other than silence or blank stares.

## 6. "Duh" and "I Don't Care"

It's unkind and hurtful when we share something we know, just learned, or wanted to add to the conversation and someone responds with a dismissive "duh" or "I don't care."

"Duh," says: "I already knew it and you're pretty dumb for just now figuring it out or trying to tell me."

"I don't care," says: "What you think and know are unimportant to me so you're unimportant."

So we don't "duh" or "I don't care" each other in our family.

## 7. Eye-Rolling and Sticking Out Tongues

These two things are banned in our house because they're super disrespectful and mean-spirited.

Eye rolling especially makes me irrationally angry because of how **rude and unkind** it is.

I don't allow my kids to do it all-- to me or to each other.



## 8. Back Talk

Balk talk or sassy comments are not okay in our home.

We don't allow our kids to speak to us or to each other in sassy, nasty ways, especially when they're saying something that should be said with kindness and empathy, like *"I'm sorry."*

We started using a **two-word magic phrase that ends it all within seconds and it's a game changer.**

## 9. Exclusivity and Secrets

We **don't do secrets** in our home.

We can keep surprises for birthdays and holidays, but secrets aren't healthy.

They breed *"I know something you don't know,"* whispering behind backs, and can protect dangerous and unhealthy behaviors.

Private conversations are absolutely necessary, but when we have something to talk about that's private, **we do it in privacy.**

Not in front of someone else so they know we're having a conversation they're not privy to.

It's **hurtful to feel left out**, especially when it's done on purpose.

## 10. Outlaw Words

Every family has words they can't stomach and therefore don't allow.

In our family, it's *"shut up," "stupid," "dumb," "loser,"* and *"hate."*

And if our kids hear it from a friend or a TV show or an adult in their lives, we remind them **they can hear the words, but they can't say them** (this applies to "cuss" words as well).

## 11. Snarky Phrases

My daughter has been using snarky phrases in her comments we didn't realize were causing damage to her siblings and the overall tone of our family.

But when we started to listen to how sentences and their meanings changed when we asked her to take out "even" "at least" and "actually", the **snarky, nasty, mean comments** quickly morphed to kinder sentences.

"Are you even going to get me a drink?" became "Are you going to get me a drink?"

"Can you at least give me a bite?" became "Can you give me a bite?"

"I actually like your dress" became "I like your dress."

"Even," "at least," and "actually" are out.

## 12. Interrupting or Talking Over Each Other

My kids get in the car and all of a sudden they all have to tell me something at that exact moment.

They **talk over each other trying to be the loudest so they get heard.**

Besides the fact I can't understand anything any of them are saying, it's also really unkind.

When we interrupt or talk over someone, we're telling them **we think what we have to say is more important than what they have to say.**

It becomes especially unkind when it's repeatedly done or on purpose.

So we practice waiting our turn and not talking when someone else is already talking.

### 13. TV, Movies, and Books where all of these other things are normalized and considered funny

Entertainment that encourages or humorizes put-downs, teasing and a general meanness doesn't work in our family.

So if our kids are reading books like *Junie B. Jones* or *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* or watching TV shows where **the main character isn't kind and it's celebrated**, we have conversations about the behavior and language.

We point out what is kind and what isn't kind, and remind our kids how the characters act and speak to their friends, siblings, and parents **isn't acceptable in our family**.

Banning these 13 things makes my kids kinder, and our home a kinder place to live, so those are 13 battles worth choosing.



# What Makes a Good Friend, Makes a Good Sibling

A good friend has certain qualities and follows certain principles. And when siblings follow these same principles, they will be a kinder sibling.

Because what they'll actually be, is a good friend to their sibling.

Good friends, and good siblings have these things in common:

## 1. They Follow the Golden Rule

Good friends follow this ancient rule because it's kindness rolled into a sentence. The kid-friendly version of the Golden Rule is: **Treat other people the way you want to be treated.**

*If you don't want to be teased, don't tease others. If you don't want to be excluded, don't exclude others. If you don't want to be ignored, don't ignore others.*

And on a more positive, flip-side:

*If you want someone to invite you to join them, invite others to join you. If you want a friend to help you, help others. If you want someone to listen to what you're saying, listen to other people.*

Kind siblings follow the Golden Rule.

**\*\*Visit the Bonus section of this ebook for a Golden Rule Bonus**

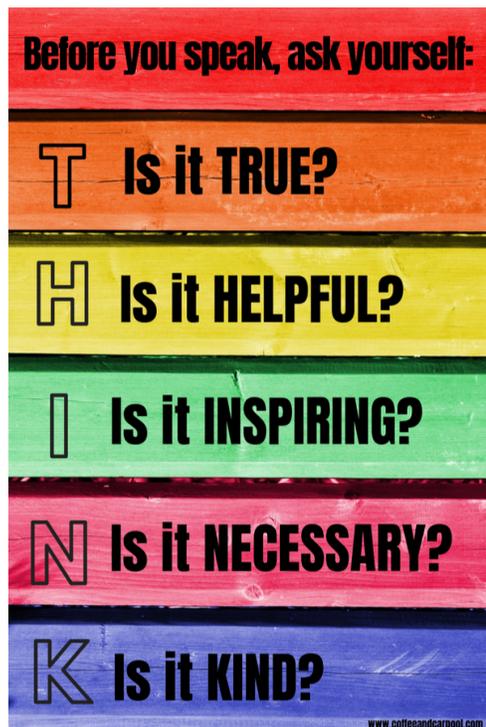
## 2. They are Mindful of Other People's Feelings

Kids, **even kind kids, are often clueless about how someone else is feeling.**

So we've taught our kids to THINK before they speak and it's been a game changer.

Things they say to each other might be true, but they fall short of all the other criteria.

*Full Disclosure:* I did not think this up, and I don't know who did, but it's genius. This is my version of it:



Growing up, **kids will accidentally hurt their siblings' feelings. But kind siblings actively try to avoid it.**

Visit the Bonus Section for one more surprise...

### 3. They are Helpers

Kids who **genuinely care about others will help when needed**. If they see their sibling struggling, they help. If their sibling drops something, they stop to pick it up with them. If a sibling falls down, they help them get back up.

If a sibling doesn't know something or can't do something yet, **a kind sibling offers help or information freely without belittling comments** such as *"I can't believe you don't know that"* or *"It's so easy. How come you can't do it?"*

Kids who are helpers and help without being asked are kind siblings to each other.



### 4. They Stand Up for Their Siblings

Siblings have to stand up for each other, especially when they're away from their parents.

And in order to physically or mentally protect their sibling, sometimes they have to stand up to a friend.

Because our **siblings are our circle of safety**.

**Kind siblings are allies, protectors and shields.**

## 5. They are Thoughtful and Generous.

Kids who are kind siblings are **thoughtful and generous**.

They draw each other pictures, save a seat for each other in a crowded restaurant, and bring treasures back from outings.

These small gifts represent the fact that they **took the time to think of their sibling**.

Their sibling was on their mind even if they weren't able to be together. Out of sight, out of mind, does not apply to kind siblings.

## 6. They Cheer on, Cheer up and Encourage

**Kind siblings root for each other's successes and are genuinely happy when their siblings succeed or do well.**

When a sibling finally makes it across the monkey bars, cheers should ensue. And if the other sibling can't cross the monkey bars yet, they **can be happy for their sibling even though they're sad for themselves**.

Likewise, a kind kid cheers up siblings when they don't succeed or are sad.

**Good siblings are our cheerleaders.** They are our comfort on our very bad, no good, horrible days.



## Be Mad Without Being Mean

*"I'll be kind when she's kind to me."*

*"She's not nice to me, why should I be kind to her?"*

*"He's mean so I'm mean back."*

All of these words have come from my kids. Just this month.

>>Insert eye roll here.<<

One of the **hardest parts of teaching kids to be kind is helping them stay kind when other people are mean to them.**

And it's especially tricky helping one of our children act with kindness when it's one of our *other* children who is acting with meanness.

Siblings squabbles tend to bring out the worst in our kids.

Here's the deal, it's **easy to be kind to someone who is kind to you.**

When someone gives you something, it can be easy to remember to say *"thank you."*

When a sibling gives you a compliment, it's pretty easy to give them one back.

When a sibling offers you a lick of their lollipop, it's easy to remember to offer them a lick of yours.

But **one of the hardest things**--and a true test of character-- is **whether we can be kind to unkind people.**

It's those hard moments when others are mean that show our true colors. Our **reactions are a mirror into our personalities and our hearts.**

So how do we teach our kids to remember their kindness?

We need to explain to our kids--**BEFORE they're in the moment of anger or being mad**--why they need to be kind to others.

Remembering the why can help kids remember to act with kindness when they don't feel like it.

## Why Being Kind When Others are Mean is Crucial:

Being kind is about what kind of person we choose to be; it's not about other people.

**Kindness is a choice we make:** how we act, what we say, and how we say it.

Every day we decide how we are going to interact with others and those interactions are how we present ourselves to the world.

If we have chosen and purposefully decided to be a kind person, then that's it. Our choices need to reflect that decision.

The **hard part is we need to remember to match our actions to that decision:**

- to smile at others,
- to say "no" politely,
- to help when it's needed,
- to include others and invite them to join in,
- to offer to get siblings a snack when we get ours, etc.

Because other people are watching us and taking cues from us. And **how we treat others shows them how we want to be treated in return.**

If my eldest daughter frequently remembers to pour 3 cups of water instead of just one for herself, eventually, one day, her siblings will get it. It'll click. They'll get her a cup of water when they get themselves one.

**Kindness is treating others how you want to be treated. Kindness is not, treat people how they treat you.** (*Back to that Golden Rule*).

So we need to act as if the people in our lives are kind.

And we need to remember that kindness is not an option. It's just a simple, normal everyday reaction.

Even if siblings say something nasty. Or sisters take each other's stuff. Or a brother doesn't hold the door open and it slams in our face.

Our kids can hear the nasty words and **choose not to say something nasty back.** They can say "*Don't speak to me that way,*" or "*That was unkind*" or "*You can't talk like that to me.*"

Because they are of course allowed to speak up and speak out towards meanness.

**But they don't need to do it in a mean way.**

Our kids can have their siblings do something unkind **without the need to retaliate.**

They can be mad or irritated or downright furious.

They can say *“Stop it”* or *“That hurts my feelings”* or *“You’re being unkind and I don’t like it.”*

But they don't have to call names, be mean back, or physically hurt each other to show their anger.

And all of these things happen with practice. And when we remind our kids yet again *why* we’re kind in the first place.



# Siblings Kindness Challenge

Nothing brings two people together faster like the chance to team up, cooperate and meet a common goal.

For our kids, we **inspire them to compete together to complete the Siblings Kindness Challenge.**

For one month, every day, our kids will do one kind thing for their sibling.

## I WILL BE KINDER TO MY SIBLINGS CHALLENGE

<b>1</b> Say "good morning" and "good night" every day.	<b>2</b> Do their chore without them knowing.	<b>3</b> Offer to get them a snack or drink when I get mine.	<b>4</b> Knock before entering closed doors to respect their privacy.	<b>5</b> Let them "win" rather than bicker over silly things.	<b>6</b> Help them when they get hurt without laughing.	<b>7</b> Take off my headphones so we can watch or listen together.
<b>8</b> Encourage & cheer them on when they do something hard.	<b>9</b> Ask permission to borrow something before using it.	<b>10</b> Invite them into my room or space to play or hang out.	<b>11</b> Use "please" and "thank you" when speaking to them.	<b>12</b> Stand up for them to others when needed.	<b>13</b> Give them a meaningful compliment.	<b>14</b> Offer to loan them something they need.
<b>15</b> Let them choose the next show, movie or song.	<b>16</b> Split the last cookie, snack or treat so they have some too.	<b>17</b> Write them a note to tell them why I appreciate them.	<b>18</b> THINK before I speak to them and stop if it will hurt their feelings.	<b>19</b> Ask them how their day was and listen to the answer.	<b>20</b> Help them when they are doing something hard.	<b>21</b> Say "no" in a kind way.
<b>22</b> Before I use up the last of anything, ask if they want it.	<b>23</b> Let them go first.	<b>24</b> When they say "no" or "stop" listen to them and stop.	<b>25</b> Comfort them when they are upset or hurt.	<b>26</b> Invite them to join me when I go somewhere or have friends over.	<b>27</b> If they're wrong, don't correct them or correct them in a kind way.	<b>28</b> Let them choose where to sit.
<b>29</b> Ask them what they want to do then do it together.	<b>30</b> Avoid sarcasm and speak in a kind way.	<b>31</b> Create a "secret" sibling handshake or language.	( for older kids) 			

When they complete their act of kindness for the day, they can cross it off.

If you have more than two kids, each month they can choose who they're going to focus on with their acts of kindness

OR they can randomly pick a sibling for each day

OR they can do their act of kindness for each of their siblings.

When all the siblings have crossed off all their days on their Challenge Calendars, **they earn a Sibling Date... a place they get to choose to go together.**

Maybe they want to grab ice cream or see a movie or go to an indoor trampoline place to run around.

Based on their age and interests, the possibilities are endless. But when they win the challenge, **not only will they have been 30 or 31 days kinder to each other, but they will also be looking forward to spending time together on their Sibling Date.** It's a win-win.

And after their Sibling Date, they can start the challenge up again for the next month.

Over time you can remove the reward and the challenge as kids become **intrinsically motivated to be kinder to their siblings.**

But in the meantime, if the thought of chocolate chip ice cream gets them to speak and act kinder to their siblings, they can have all the ice cream dates they can earn.

[Download the Sibling Kindness Challenge here.](#)

Note: there are two versions depending on the ages of your kids so you can choose the most age-appropriate one.

The "*I Can be Kinder to my Siblings Challenge*" is designed for **younger kids.**

The "*I Will be Kinder to my Siblings Challenge*" is geared for **older kids.**

## Keep Going: Family Kindness Challenge

There are so many fun ways families can keep being kind towards each other and towards people in their communities.

These kindness activities and challenges may inspire your family to keep going, think bigger, and **continue with your kindness activities.**

### Year Round Activities

[Kindness Elves](#)

[100 Acts of Kindness Challenge](#)

[Kindness Skittles Game](#)

[Volunteering as a Family](#)

### Holiday-Themed Activities

[Teal Pumpkin Project for Halloween](#)

[Kindness Elves at Christmas](#)

[Kindness Elves at Valentine's Day](#)

# How to Make Sibling Books

For each sibling relationship, I make two books.

One for my older child from their point of view and one for my younger child from their point of view.

The pictures are the same, but the wording is slightly different.

And these sibling books quickly became treasured books in our house.

## Materials Need for Sibling Books:

- Printed photos of your kids together
- Brightly colored construction paper/Scrapbook paper/cardstock paper
- Sharpie
- Glue stick



## Directions for Making Sibling Books:

1. Cut the paper to about 8 ½ inches by 5 ½ inches.
2. On the cover, title it your kids' *Sister-Brother Book* or *Sister Book* for two girls or *Brother Book* for two boys.

3. For the first picture, glue down a picture of your kids when they first met. Leave a margin on the left of the picture to bind the book and leave a margin under the picture so you can write the caption.



4. For the caption on the first page, you can write, "I've known my brother *Braeden* his whole life. I went to the hospital to meet him."

Or if it's from the younger child's point of view, "I've known my sister *Addison* my whole life. She came to the hospital to meet me," **inserting your own kids' names.**



5. For the next pages, continue to glue on photos and add captions.



Some page ideas I've used in our books:

- When my brother was younger, I helped him with his bath.
- When my brother was a baby I would feed him his bottle.
- Now that my brother is older, we can play together.
- We both like to play with our blocks.
- And we both like our water table. I play in my bathing suit and he plays in his diaper.
- We also both like ice cream!
- Sometimes my brother bugs me a little. Sometimes he makes me mad.
- But most of the time, we love being together.
- I love my brother Braeden and he loves me.

6. When the pages are complete, take the book to an office supply store and have them *hard* laminate the pages and spiral bind the book.

7. Round the corners of each page with scissors since hard lamination can be sharp on the corners.

My kids' Sister-Brother books are now tucked safely away in their baby boxes. They were chewed on, spilled on, and dropped.

But most importantly, they were taken off their bookshelves often. These **books were some of their most requested books to be read.**

And during their quiet times, they would often “read” their books to themselves and to each other.

These siblings books are a **simple, but meaningful way for my kids to feel more connected with each other** and are a helpful reminder they really do love each other and want to be together.

Which in our house is priceless.



## Bonus: Posters for your Family to Raise Kind Siblings

These are digital posters. When you download them, take them to print at an office supply store on 11 x 17 paper. It should cost you less than \$2 to print them. While you're there, you can laminate them for durability.



2 Versions of the Golden Rule Posters. [Get them here:](#)



**Before you speak, ask yourself:**

**T Is it TRUE?**

**H Is it HELPFUL?**

**I Is it INSPIRING?**

**N Is it NECESSARY?**

**K Is it KIND?**

[www.coffeeandcarpool.com](http://www.coffeeandcarpool.com)

THINK Poster. [Get it Here:](#)

## What's Next?

Congrats on finishing the Raising Kind Siblings book. Now that's it's over, you may be wondering, what's next?

Come and join **other like-minded parents** in our Raising Kind Kids Movement Facebook Group.

**We're changing the world, one kind kid, one kind action at a time.**

[Click here to join the movement.](#) We'd love to have you.

