

# Comparing leads to trouble among siblings

One child takes off his boots at the back door, just like he's supposed to. The other, leaves a trail of muddy water across the kitchen floor.

At times like this, it is tempting to compare siblings; "Donna, look at the mess you made! Why can't you be more like your brother? He knows better than to walk through the house with wet boots on."

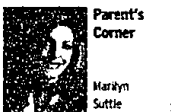
Comparing one child to another increases sibling rivalry by creating a win/lose relationship.

It pits siblings against each other for a sense of self worth. Yet, even the most well-meaning parents find themselves comparing at one time or another.

How does comparing lead to trouble between siblings? What can you do when you are tempted to compare?

## NEGATIVE RESULTS

One mom said to her daughter, "Shawne, your room is a mess. Lori would never leave her room like that. Go to your room and don't come out until



Parent's Corner  
Marilyn Suttle

it's as clean as Lori's." Shawne begins cleaning her room.

The comparison seems to lead to positive results, but let's take a closer look. If you could read Shawne's mind as she heads off to her room, what would she be thinking?

"I'm so glad I have a sister like Lori. Thanks to her, I know exactly how clean my room needs to be," or, "Lori is always getting me into trouble. I wish I didn't have a sister. I'll make her pay for this." When you look at a comparison from the child's point of view, it's no surprise that hostile feelings are created.

The hostility one child feels for another, after being compared, can poison the sibling relationship.

Good feelings are replaced with resentment and

frustration, and sometimes fantasies of revenge. Worse yet, children learn to value themselves based on their sibling's behaviors and attributes instead of their own.

## DESCRIBE, DON'T COMPARE

How can mom encourage Shawne to clean her room without comparing? She can specifically describe what she wants from her child without any mention of a sibling.

"The toys on your bedroom floor need to be put in the toy box and your drawers need to be closed." What does Shawne think now? "Oh darn. I guess I have to finish cleaning my room." Did you notice that she was not distracted by thoughts about her sibling this time?

Replace unfavorable comparisons with a specific description of how you feel or what you need from the individual child.

Instead of comparing: "You would get better grades, if you worked as hard as Marilyn."

Describe how you feel about this child: "I feel confident that more study time will help you improve your grades."

Instead of comparing: "Stop

shouting. Osa never talks to me that way."

Describe what you need from this child: "I expect you to tell me how angry you are without raising your voice."

We compare because it seems like a good way to motivate. In reality, children often feel less motivated than ever. Kids who believe that they can't live up to a sibling's accomplishments, stop trying. If they can't be best at being good, they may decide to be best at being bad. This negative outcome can be stepped by eliminating comparisons.

## FAVORABLE COMPARISONS

Sometimes, we compare children favorably to their siblings. Here are some favorable comparisons:

"I wish your brother took his schoolwork as seriously as you do."

"I can always count on you to be ready on time. Your brother is always making us late."

"Your hair is just gorgeous. I can't do a thing with your sister's hair."

On the surface favorable comparisons seem harmless.

However, parents in my workshops, share the following reactions to being compared favorably to their siblings:

"I felt superior to my siblings and they still resent me for it."

"To this day, I feel pressured to be the responsible one."

"I was the smarter one. I did everything I could to make my younger brother look stupid. I was afraid that I wouldn't be special anymore if he got attention for being smart too."

"I felt sorry for my sister, and guilty for being favored."

"I felt uncomfortable hearing my brother criticized. I wondered if they ever criticized me behind my back."

Making a child feel good at the sibling's expense, creates a backlash of hurtful feelings. Replace favorable comparisons with a specific description of what you notice or appreciate about your child as an individual. For example, "It's nice to see how much you value your education." "Thanks for being ready on time." "Your hair is a pleasure to look at."

## HELPFUL WORDS

Awareness helps to eliminate

sibling comparisons from your parenting style.

Whenever I'd hear myself begin to compare my kids, I'd stop in mid-sentence. It was surprising to see how often I'd catch myself.

With practice, I began translating a comparison in my head into helpful words that focused directly to the needs of the child I was speaking to. In time, I began to see more warmth between my kids, and less conflict.

By eliminating comparisons, you increase effective communication, and decrease hostility between siblings.

Instead of comparing, describe specifically what you see, feel, or need from each child individually, with no mention of a sibling. Eliminating comparisons alone, may not turn bitter rivals into loving buddies, but it does reduce friction, allowing friendly feelings to grow.

Marilyn Suttle provides personal and professional life-skills presentations, including parenting, work/life balance, and self esteem. Email her at MsSuttle@aol.com or visit her web site: <http://Members.aol.com/MSuttle>

# Applicants sought for student music education awards

Applications are available for students in grades 7-12 who plan to compete in Farmington Musicale's Awards for Musical Excellence.

This annual competition offers cash awards to further music education.

It is open to students who attend Farmington public or private schools, to children of a Farmington Musicale member and to those whose primary residence is in Farmington or Farmington Hills, but who attend school elsewhere.

Applications are to be distributed the week of Feb. 3 to the music departments in all

Farmington-area middle and high schools. They may also be obtained at the Farmington Public Libraries.

Applications must be completed and returned, postmarked by midnight, Friday, March 7.

This year the competition will be held Saturday, March 29, at Nardin Park United Methodist Church in Farmington Hills. Categories will be: piano, string/harp/classical guitar, wind/brass/percussion instruments divided into three grade levels: 7-8, 9-10, 11-12. The vocal category will be divided into two grade

levels: 9-10, 11-12. Cash awards will be given in each grade division.

First place winners will perform their winning solos in recital at 3 p.m. Sunday, April 13, at St. Louis Lutheran Church. Awards will be presented at that time, as well as the Strey-McCullum Piano Award, which is presented to the student who is judged to be the "most outstanding pianist" regardless of grade level.

The recital is open to all free of charge. The Farmington Musicale is a member of the National Federation of Music Clubs.

# Art on the Grand 2003 entrants are sought

The Cultural Arts Division of the City of Farmington Hills is seeking artists to participate in Art on the Grand 2003. Juried fine arts fair to be held July 17-19 in downtown Farmington in conjunction with the Farmington Area Founders Festival.

Art on the Grand was introduced in 2001 by the City of Farmington Hills Special Services Department, in answer to the community's desire to add a fine arts component to the 37-year-old

Farmington Area Founders Festival. The fair takes place in Memorial Park, located in downtown Farmington on Grand River.

A small but elegant fair, Art on the Grand has been an extremely popular addition to the Festival.

With the support of grants and City funding, Art on the Grand 2003 will also offer live jazz and other music as well as strolling entertainers and children's activities, making

this an interactive fair.

This year's application fee is \$150 for the three days. Interested artists should call the Cultural Arts Division of the City of Farmington Hills at (248) 473-1836 for more information and an application form.

The deadline for applications is Feb. 28; applications received after that date will be placed on a waiting list for potential consideration.

**THE Observer & Eccentric**  
*Congratulates the Feature Teachers for January*

*Each teacher will receive a dozen roses and 4 movie passes courtesy of The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, Wesley Berry Florist and Star Theatres.*

**— Anne Tobias —**

Congratulations to Anne Tobias a first grade teacher at Farmington Elementary School in the Garden City School District.

Anne Tobias is an Observer & Eccentric Teacher of the Month for January. She was nominated for the award by Patty Boucher a Garden City resident who is proud to have been her student. In fact, Boucher's son and daughter both had the pleasure of experiencing Anne Tobias' boundless energy. She was also nominated by Farmington Principal Keith Anelinger who wrote: "Parents who were taught by Anne request that their child be placed in her room without exception because of her kind and caring manner."

Anne Tobias has been teaching first graders at Farmington Elementary School for the last 45 years. Both Boucher and Anelinger praise Anne Tobias for her dedication to students and parents. "She passionately draws parents into their children's education by making numerous personal, written and verbal contacts and individual conferences. Her students test out above national averages regardless of their socio-economic status," wrote Anelinger.

Boucher adds: "First grade is a very important time in a child's life and she makes it a memorable one. She truly cares about her kids and makes every child feel special."

Her nominators call Anne Tobias a human dynamo and outstanding teacher. The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers is proud to call her Teacher of the Month for January.

**— Jackie Klugman —**

Congratulations to Jackie Klugman, a musical theater and broadcasting teacher at Orchard Lake Middle School in the West Bloomfield School District. Jackie Klugman is an Observer & Eccentric Teacher of the Month for January. Jackie Klugman was nominated by Linda Hinn and Denny Friedman of West Bloomfield who wrote to tell us that "Jackie is a miracle come true, always giving herself to help others. She is an advocate and a voice in the community for all children."

Linda Friedman described how when her son, Denny, came to Orchard Lake Middle School, Jackie welcomed him with open arms.

"Denny has Down syndrome and needed an advocate to believe in him and support inclusion to help him succeed in his education. Jackie is not only a great listener, but also a kind soul with boundless energy. Jackie Klugman treats Denny just like every other student in her class. Denny looks forward to his musical theater class and is proud to show her what he can do because of her warm, positive response. Denny's high self-esteem is proof of her never-ending support. In Jackie's eyes, everyone has a special talent and she works hard to help everyone be a star in her classes!"

The Friedmans call Jackie Klugman a hero. The Observer & Eccentric is pleased to call her Teacher of the Month for January.