

## Speaker Notes

### Sibling/Parent Relationships: Building Healthy Relations

#### Page 1 – Title Slide

None

#### Page 2 – What We Need to Consider

None

#### Page 3 – What is a Relationship?

- The definition of a relationship is the connection between two individuals as manifested in their interactions (actions, verbal, and nonverbal), which influence their beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, and feelings toward each other and which in turn influence their further interactions.
- A relationship involves two individuals. Events and relationships with other individuals provide the context in which the original relationship is located.
- Many types of relationships exist (marital, parent-child, sibling, work, friendship, etc.), and they can be defined by the varying degrees of closeness/interconnectedness or relative independence of the individuals involved.

#### Page 4 – Discussion

- Sibling Relationship:
  - The distinguishing characteristic of a sibling relationship is the interdependency of two children in a family who either:
    - Share some degree of common biological origin,
    - Share a relationship defined legally, or
    - Share some degree of commitment or socialization to the norms of sibling roles in a particular culture.
  - In all cases, sibling relationships:
    - Are ascribed rather than voluntary
    - Include some history of intimate family experiences
    - Are enduring, perhaps lasting a lifetime
    - Are more or less equal
- Parent-Parent Relationship:
  - The parent-parent relationship is the foundation of the family. When the foundation is strong, the family holds up even under great pressure; when it's shaky, the whole family is at risk.
  - The risk is not only separation or divorce. Even if the family stays together, a stressful parent-parent relationship puts a strain on every member of the family.
- Sibling-Parent Relationship:
  - The sibling-parent relationship is among the most important.
  - This relationship consists of a combination of behaviors, feelings, and expectations that are unique to a particular parent and a particular child.
  - The relationship involves the full extent of a child's development.
  - The quality of this relationship is affected by the parent's age, experience, and self-confidence; by the stability of the parent's marriage; and by the unique characteristics of the child.

## Page 5 – Unique Characteristics of Sibling Relationships

- Relationships between brothers and sisters are a kind of shelter that few other relationships can provide. Siblings are, for better and for worse, each other's ultimate fellow travelers. They are co-voyagers in a world without many enduring reference points.
- The sibling relationship is usually the longest relationship that an individual will experience in their lifetime: This appears to be true even among half-siblings, step-siblings, and adoptive siblings, whose relationships usually begin early enough in life to have a longer time course than relationships with parents, spouses, offspring, or most other friends and relatives. Thus, duration itself can be an important factor in determining the impact of the relationship.
- We cannot choose our siblings as we do our friends: That's what makes this relationship unique. The sibling relationship is ascribed rather than earned; that is, brotherhood and sisterhood are statuses obtained by birth (or by legal action).
- The childhood sibling relationship is one of daily intimate contact as the siblings interact within the home.
- The relationship between siblings is often seen as equal: Some power or status differences may exist between siblings based on age, size, intelligence, knowledge, social skills, economic success, other achievements, influence with parents, etc. However, in the majority of cases, siblings' feelings of acceptance for one another allow them to relate as equals.
- Siblings share a long history as well as a lifetime of memories and stories: For example, your sister may be the only other living person who remembers those smelly and leaky tuna sandwiches Mom made for us as children to bring to school; or your brother is the only one who can remember how your grandpa used to eat your vegetables behind Grandma's back. This shared history is priceless and becomes more valuable as we age.

## Page 6 – Factors Affecting Sibling Relationships

None

## Page 7 – Birth Order: First Born

- First-time parents sweat the details. They document every milestone, celebrate each small achievement, and worry if anything comes later than expected.
- Like the pioneers of the old West, first-borns learn to be resourceful, self-reliant, and tough. They demand a lot of themselves and of others.

## Page 8 – First Born Relationships with Their Younger Siblings

- The other area in which first-borns have special relationships, of course, is with their later-born siblings. Many firstborns are surprised (not to say shocked) by the appearance of a little competitor. Some respond aggressively, but others become even more determined to be good as a way of protecting their status in the family. Most show a mixture of behaviors—helping with a diaper change one minute, pinching the baby the next.
- Amazingly, younger siblings often idolize the older brothers and sisters who torment them. The first-born becomes the leader of the children within the family and may act as their protector in the neighborhood, as well. First-borns are often called on to babysit younger siblings and keep them in line. They learn to accept responsibility and to expect others to listen to them. On the down side, this tendency to be the boss leads some first-borns to try to dominate every situation and run roughshod over any opposition.

### **Page 9 – Birth Order: Middle Child**

- This uncomfortable feeling of not having a defined place in the family can lead to:
  - Reaching outside the family for significant relationships
  - Approaching society from a different perspective, e.g., scientific and social revolutions that drive history forward (the hippies in the 1960s)
- Parents may not have as strong a sense of what to expect from a middle child as they do for a first-born or their youngest. In one way, that's a good thing, because it gives the middle child freedom to follow his individual path. On the other hand, the sense of being less understood makes some middle children feel unloved.

### **Page 10 – Middle Child Relationships with Their Siblings**

- For any middle child, the biggest point of comparison is the sibling who falls just before them in the birth order. Often, rather than competing head-on with that older sibling, the middle child chooses to go in a different direction. If the older sibling is a great student, for example, the middle child may become a musician or an athlete. (There's some research suggesting that middle children are more likely to engage in dangerous sports, perhaps because they are used to taking risks.) By choosing a niche that isn't already occupied, a middle child increases his chances of standing out and being noticed while decreasing the risk of negative comparisons.
- Middle children, who are usually smaller than their older siblings while they're growing up, often learn non-aggressive strategies to get what they want, such as negotiation, cooperation, or seeking parental intervention.
- As the underdogs in many sibling conflicts, middle children often develop a fine sense of empathy with the downtrodden, as do many youngest children.
- Where first and last children may tend to be self-centered, middle children often take a genuine interest in getting to know other people.
- Being in the middle, they may find it easier to look at interpersonal situations from various points of view.

### **Page 11 – Birth Order: Youngest Child**

- The parents have more experience under their belts and are more likely to take a laissez-faire attitude toward such issues as developmental milestones, toilet training, dating, and so on. They are more confident that things will work out for the best, and their relationship with their last-born is less intense than with the older children.
- The youngest child usually feels like they never measure up to their more experienced and accomplished siblings.

### **Page 12 – Youngest Child/Older Sibling Relationships**

- Since last-born children are rarely the strongest or most capable during childhood, they often carve out a place for themselves by being clever and charming. If you're the smallest, it's important to be able to make people like you, and many youngest children develop impressive social skills. Within the family, they often become skilled politicians, learning to get through negotiation what they can't win by force. They may become the resident peacekeepers—but they're also perfectly capable of stirring up trouble when it serves their purposes, teaming up with one sibling or another.
- Many last-born children capitalize on their position as smallest and weakest by elevating helplessness to a high art. They learn that they don't have to do housework, for example, if they can get others to do it for them. Playing the "baby card" also allows them to avoid the

consequences for wrongdoing—for example, breaking a sibling's toy. Other youngest children, however, refuse to accept the helpless label. Instead, like determined terriers, they grab hold of a position and just hang on.

- The years of sticking up for themselves against the might of their older siblings prepares these children for careers as successful advocates, often championing the cause of—appropriately enough—the underdog.

### **Page 13 – Marital Relationship**

- Children are very tuned-in to the state of their parents' relationship. When parents are happy together, children readily pick up on the vibes. When they show physical affection for each other by hugging or kissing, the children pay attention. A toddler or preschooler will come over to be part of the family hug. A school-age boy may groan when Mom and Dad "smooch," but he's actually glad and (since he almost certainly has classmates whose parents are divorced) reassured.
- Children know when there are problems in their parents' relationship even when the parents try to hide them, and even though the children may be too young to put their concerns into words. This makes sense when you consider that children depend on their parents to meet their every physical and emotional need. It is vitally important to them that their parents, the source of all good things, are OK.
- When the parents' relationship is under strain, it affects the children in two ways. It makes them feel anxious and insecure, which can lead to behavior problems or other symptoms. And it reduces the parents' ability to give them their full love and attention, because they are distracted by their own unhappiness.

### **Page 14 – Ways to Manage Conflict Between Siblings**

- Trying to teach siblings to express anger, irritation, annoyance, or resentment toward one another without cruelty can be an exhausting and discouraging process. But we have to keep hammering away. It's one of the most valuable lessons we can teach our children.

### **Page 15 – Remember**

None

### **Page 16 – Remember (Continued)**

None

### **Page 17 – Remember (Continued)**

None

### **Page 18 – Summary**

None

### **Page 19 – Questions**

None

### **Page 20 - Resources**

None

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