



Sibling Relationships

My 14 year old son used to be best friends with his little brother. Lately, my older child ignores his little brother, and they don't spend as much time together. What do I do?

It is upsetting for parents to see their children drift apart. Siblings share a special bond, and it brings parents much pleasure to see their kids spend quality time together. The teenage years, however, bring on behavioral changes that impact how adolescents view family, and it feels like it happens almost overnight. All of sudden your child prefers time with friends more than time with the family. And when your son is home, staying in his room, playing on the computer, and text messaging his friends becomes his priority. This behavior is part of normal adolescent development.

It is important to allow your son some space to grow as well as encourage him to develop his own identity. There are, however, many things you can do to make sure your offspring and family still remain close. Regular dinners are a great way to promote family ties. Cooking favorite meals and avoiding weekend night gatherings will ensure your changing child happily participates. Encourage your sons to engage in their favorite activities--drop them off at the movies, send them outside to shoot baskets, or suggest they watch their favorite TV show--will enhance the opportunities to bond. Have your oldest baby-sit your youngest. This not only promotes brotherly bonding but also develops a sense of pride and work ethic as your teen earns his own money to pay for his own things.

Lastly, don't forget about the little one. He may be mourning the loss of quality time he previously had with his brother. Take this opportunity to set up more play dates, enroll him in a new activity, or just spend some quality parent/son time. Talk with him about his older sibling's changing attitude to ensure that he does not take this new situation too personally. Finally, make sure he knows that his brother still loves him.

Despite your adolescent's desire for independence, he still wants to spend time with his family and his little brother. As children grow, it becomes a parent's job to develop creative, positive, and flexible ideas that promote individual growth and family togetherness.