How can I stop my teen children from always competing with one another?

Dorothy Horton, PsyD, answers your questions in her latest Ask Doctor Dee column.

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Q: How can I stop my teen children from always competing with one another?

A: It's normal for kids at home to compete. That said, sibling rivalry can be aggravated when parents don't spend enough quality time with each child, play favorites or put kids into categories. Therefore, to reduce the frequency of brothers and sisters competing with one another, parents should strive to observe the following supportive behaviors.

Don't label kids. Respect your children's individuality, and don't use limiting descriptions—such as "the smart one" or "the athletic one"—to define your kids. Labeling can generate negative attitudes and behaviors and prompt teens to compete for a parent's attention.

Bestow attention equitably. Set aside quality time with each teen daily, as this can help to show kids it's unnecessary for them to fight to get noticed.

Arrange frequent family meetings. These powwows give everyone a chance to voice their opinions and allow parents to add or delete rules.

Stay out of kids' conflicts. Allow kids to resolve disagreements without your input, unless fights escalate. Even then, subtly lead them to negotiate their differences with suggested compromises. If no resolution materializes, parents should follow through with a neutral decision.

Lead by example. Children will do as you do—not as you say—so when parents squabble, they should be mindful to interact with each other in a respectful way.

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