

# Turning Sibling Rivalry *into* Sibling Harmony

Karen Doherty and Georgia Coleridge just may have the solutions to help make family life happier



*"My children fight so much that I constantly daydream about going on holiday – without them!"*

If your children bicker, argue or fight – driving each other and you to distraction – you aren't alone. We found it's the number one problem facing most parents. Children in at least 80 per cent of families tease and pick on each other or worse, and our own children (we both have four) were firmly in that camp.

So to help other families and our own, we set out to find ways to put an end to the constant squabbling and make family life happier. We found that one of the best things you can do to minimise tension between your children is to get them outside to burn off their extra energy and get their endorphins going. But as Karen lives in London and Georgia lives in the country, we had to approach this differently.

#### **Karen the urban mum says:**

Living in London, I have to find ways to get my children occupied outside so they don't stay cooped up indoors annoying each other. Thank heaven for the parks! When they were very little, we'd go to the sandpit in Holland Park. Then we couldn't believe our luck – along came the Princess Diana playground in Kensington Gardens and the rebuild of the big playground in Holland Park. Suddenly there was entertainment for all of them right nearby. I can't count the times we've been to Hyde Park as they've grown. They used to ride their scooters and bicycles to the fountains, and they moved on to doing running races round the pond and cycling through the entire park. We have a dog that drags us around the Serpentine.

Last winter they were bickering and really winding me up. So I suggested we cycle down to far end at Park Lane. Big mistake. We took off with my youngest behind me on the tandem. But I hadn't taken into account just how horribly cold it was. Half way there they started whimpering. I honestly thought we'd warm up if we just kept pedalling, so I told them to press ahead. But by the time we were on the far side of the park, I was whimpering along with them. What was I thinking! I was freezing and wondering how on earth I could keep going, so how must they feel? My entire body ached with the cold. Adrenaline from the fear of being responsible for them kept me going; they pedalling for their lives.

The good news is we finally made it home,



and though I wouldn't recommend taking your family cycling in the depths of winter, it did put an end to their fighting that day. As a bonus, we now have a shared bit of family history that we look back on and laugh about.

#### **Georgia the country mum says:**

With four children cooped-up and squabbling in London, and a husband desperate for country air, we felt that the Cotswolds held the key to family harmony. After brief sojourns in Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire, we fell in love with a house in Worcestershire, with views of Bredon Hill, a lawn big enough to play football, and an orchard of neglected fruit trees for the children to climb.

My happiest childhood memories are of long summer weekends mooching around my grandmother's country garden. My little sister and I played together in the sandpit, picked blackberries and fed the chickens. Nothing thrilling, but mysteriously we never fought the way we did in London. I wanted my children to have the same chance to enjoy each other's company and build up a memory-bank of happy, shared experiences.

I admit that sometimes it's still hard to pry them away from the lure of Nintendo or

their iPods. But if I can persuade them to go outside, the Cotswolds air soon works its magic. Being isolated from your siblings behind a pair of earphones seems less alluring when there are sun-warmed strawberries to find together in the greenhouse, croquet to play on the absurdly lumpy lawn, or a muddy pond to swim in. It's harder still to turn them out of the TV room (where they can bicker for hours over the controls). But once outside, there's no point in staying sulky when there is a tree-house to build out of old packing cases and camouflage netting from the army surplus shop. Even when it's cold and dark, there are things they can do together. Bonfires to build, with marshmallows roasting on sticks. Or German spotlight, with one child on guard with a torch, and the rest creeping up to capture the oak tree. Sometimes they just sit in the garden, chatting, about what they'll do next. Soak conkers in vinegar? Attach a skateboard to the back of the bicycle? Rig up a tyre swing? Maybe a zipwire over the pond? By moving to Worcestershire they've discovered that there is always something unexpectedly fun to do with their siblings. ■

*Sibling Rivalry – Seven Simple Solutions, Bantam Press, April 2010. www.KarenAndGeorgia.com*

