If you have brothers and sisters (your siblings) you will have someone who belongs to you, who has shared memories with you, and who can help and support you. However, sometimes it may not seem that way at all! You may seem to be always fighting and arguing. You may get really fed up with living so closely together.

What can you do about it?

> Sometimes you might think mum or dad loves your brother or sister more than they love you. If you feel like that, tell mum or dad how you feel.
> Sometimes you might think your brother or sister is better at everything than you. **There are good and special things about everyone!**
> Sometimes there is a problem about getting along together - sharing a home and parents and a room etc. Brothers and sisters can learn a lot about getting on with other people from learning to live together at home!

There are three main skills that you need to learn in order to have a fairly peaceful time together.

These are **Communication, Respect and Negotiation.**

**Communication**

This means that you talk to each other. It also means that you listen to each other.

Here are some ways to have good communication in your family (you might have to ask mum and dad to help you get some of these started):

> Make a rule that if one person is talking, the others are listening.
> Make sure everyone has a turn to talk.
> Use family meetings to talk about things that affect everyone.
> Make a rule that nobody shouts.
> Make sure that school notices, sports notices, homework and invitations are all put onto a family calendar so that everyone knows what is happening and when.
> Write notes to each other, like a message board, and always put them in the same place so that everyone always looks there when they come home.
> Always ask if you want to borrow something, watch a program on TV, record something or have a friend over.
> Work out a timetable to take turns using the computer (or TV or anything that is shared) if everyone is trying to use it at the same time.
> If you feel upset about something, talk to the person who has upset you and see if you can sort it out in a friendly manner.
Set up a chore chart so that everyone has some jobs to do, even small people can do something to help.

Try to organise a special time for each child to have some time alone with mum or dad (and another special relative like grandma or grandad). It's great to have someone's attention all to your self once in a while.

**Respect**

If you want people to treat you nicely then you have to treat them nicely too. People who treat each other with respect will get along together much better than if they are rude, loud and selfish.

**How to respect each other:**

- Use your manners.
- Don't use rude language.
- No put-downs.
- Encourage each other (build-ups).
- Help each other.
- Everyone needs some space at times - respect each other's need to be alone sometimes.
- Don't try and take over the other person's friends or try to tag along unless you're invited. Respect their right to have their own friends, and they'll respect yours.
- Respect each other's belongings. Don't take or use something without permission from the owner.
- If you don't want to share your stuff, then you have the right to say no or, you might work out a trade, eg. "you can play with my computer game if I can borrow your skates." Decide how long the trade lasts and remember to return what you have borrowed. (In the same condition in which you borrowed it.)
- Don't tell 'secrets' about your brother or sister (unless it's to keep him or her safe). You wouldn't like everyone to know any of your private stuff unless you chose to tell him or her.

To find out more about respect have a look at this topic **Respect - a way of life.**

**Negotiation (working things out between you)**

This can be very difficult to learn.

Being the eldest, youngest, middle or whatever does not give you any more rights than the others in the family.

There are a few things to remember if you are going to be good at negotiation:

- **Be fair.** Don't try to 'put one over' on a younger person (one day she will grow up and remember!)
- Use your good **communication skills.**
- Remember that you are trying to find a solution which has something good for everyone.
What to do

Trusting each other is a big part of negotiation. Maybe using this word will help you understand the process better.

- Talk quietly.
- Respect each other's rights to their opinions.
- Understand each other's needs.
- Say what you want to get out of the process.
- Try to find out what you agree on.
- Idea-sharing gives you lots of ways to solve the problem.
- No put-downs allowed.
- Good solutions are when everyone gets something of what they want.

What else you can do

> Once you have come up with a plan, accept responsibility. If you've agreed to do something then make sure it is done by the right time.

> If you can't sort things out, ask mum, dad or another adult to sit in while you each come up with suggestions to solve the problem.

> Take the problem to a family meeting.

> If you can't all agree on everything, then find what you do agree on and go from there, eg you may all agree that jobs should be shared - then you need to look at what jobs, draw up a chart and decide who does which jobs and when. You may not be able to do your job on a particular day so you will need to negotiate with the others to decide who will swap days with you.

> Sometimes voting for something can sort things out. Remember that if you vote, most of you have to agree to what has been voted on before it can happen.

Using all these ideas does take time, but if you can use them successfully then there are a lot of benefits:

> A happier home.
> Everyone feels that they are an important part of the family.
> Everyone feels safe.
> Everyone feels that their opinions and feelings matter.
> Everyone works together.
> Everyone cares about each other.
> Everyone has their needs met in the family home.
> You have learned how to cooperate with others.
> You have learned really important skills which you can use all your life.
> You have learned more about your brothers and sisters and can understand each other more.

I guess that there are still going to be times when you will annoy and get sick of each other, but if you use your skills, you should be able to recognise and work through these times.
Dr Kim says

You can choose your friends but you can’t choose your relatives. But relatives are people who can be there for you always. Learn to accept each other’s differences, take pride in each other’s success and be there for each other in the sad and bad times.

If you feel that you aren’t as good as your brother or sister, check our topic on Self-esteem. Being able to solve problems without anyone feeling that they have been treated unfairly is a very important skill too - see our topic, Conflict resolution.