

5 ways to Forge a Fabulous Friendship



1. Meet, greet, take a seat

Do you want a stronger family?

Better relationships with your sibs?

A fresh way to let your voice be heard?

Family meetings are your chance to sit down with your family face-to-face and work together. Ask your family if you can meet for at least 15 minutes once a week to (drum roll, please) COMMUNICATE.

In a family meeting, each person gets a chance to share opinions and feelings. Talk to your dad or mom about it first, and then use the tips in this section.

Set some ground rules.

Make full-participation a must—everyone shows up, everyone has a say. Turn off any electronics (the TV, hand-held video games, cell phones) that might distract you. Hold the meeting in the same place each time, with everyone seated. No teasing or name-calling in meetings.

Make an agenda.

Meetings can be a time to talk about sibling conflicts and solve problems. Write down the issues each person wants to bring up. Make sure people speak calmly—no yelling or whining. Ask for a parent's help in working things out.

Get a good vibe going.

Start the meeting on a positive note by giving each person a compliment, telling jokes, or thanking someone for a favor. How about some tasty treats?

Let everyone be heard.

Take turns talking without interrupting each other. You may even want to pass around an object that the speaker holds each time. For example, you could have a “talking stick,” a microphone with the sound turned off, or a lightsaber (keep that turned off, too). Some families make a special hat for the speaker to wear. If you’d like, let the youngest child talk first—or take turns going first each week.



Set a timer.

Usually, 15 minutes is a good time-frame for a family meeting, but you may need more. Whatever length of time you agree to, when the timer goes off, you are done.

End on a high note.

Play a quick game, read an inspiring quote, or join hands and say one thing you're grateful for—whatever helps you feel connected.

Make sure “Family Meeting” gets put on the calendar each week—same time, same place—so everyone is on board.



2. Check your feet

Go find a pair of your sister's or brother's shoes. (Be sure to get permission first. And hey, sorry if they stink!)

Now try on the shoes. How do they feel? Big, small, tight, roomy, pinchy, comfy?

Walk around in them a while, thinking about that old saying "Take a walk in someone else's shoes." It means to put yourself in the other person's place—imagining life from his or her view.



You're wearing your sib's shoes . . . now think about how certain situations might look and feel to your brother or sister.

Does the amount of chores at our house seem fair—why or why not?

How does the family treat me?

Who has more privileges and responsibilities at home? Why?

When I get teased, I feel _____ .

What makes me angry, sad, jealous?

I wish _____ would change at home.

I'm trying hard to get along when I do this: _____ .

I know my brother/sister loves me because
_____ .

This exercise can help you see your sibs in a new light. After walking in their shoes, ask yourself:

“Is there something I'm doing to make things worse for my sib?”

“Is there something I can do to make things better?”

3. If you can't stand the heat . . .

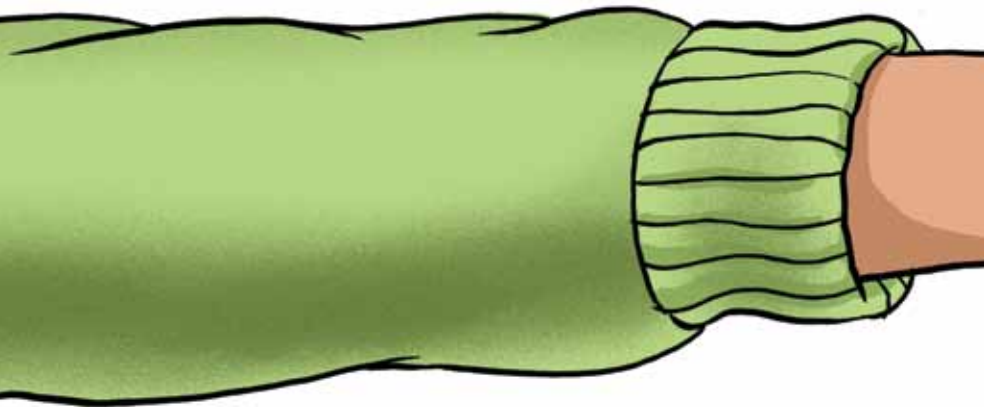
Have you ever heard the phrase, “If you can’t stand the heat, get out of the kitchen”? It means if you don’t like the way something is, then get away from it.

Leave.

Skeedaddle.

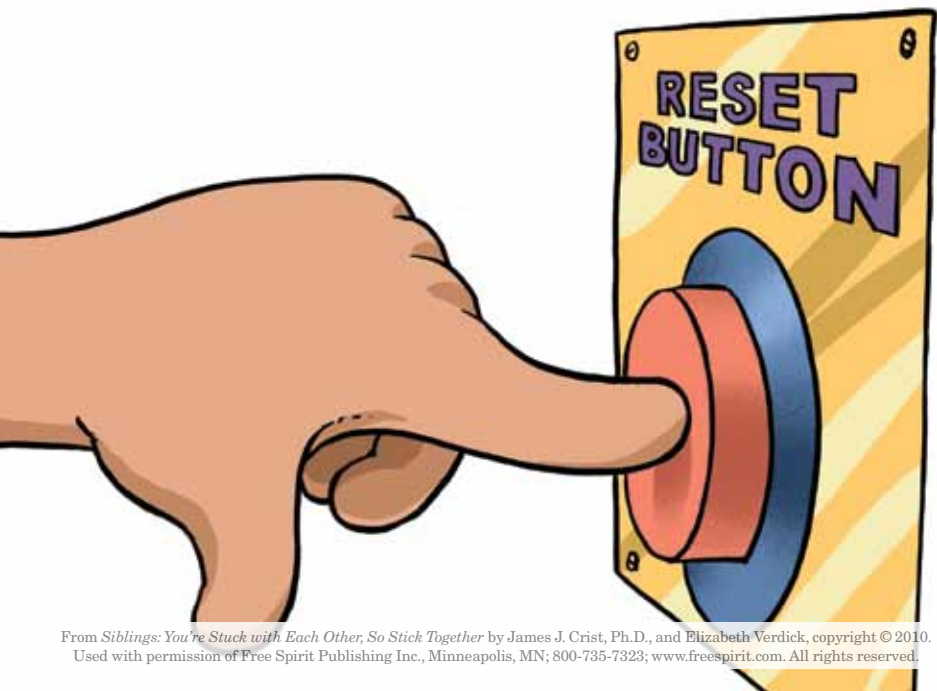
Bonding with sibs isn’t always easy. You may still have nit-picky fights—hey, stop *touching* me!—and days that go from bad to worse. That’s okay. Take a breather when you need one. Time away from each other can help you relax and think about what’s going on.

Think of it as pushing your reset button.



Here are some ways to **chill out**:

- ★ Move your body (ride your bike, take a walk, dance, run, swing, swim, practice karate, jump rope).
- ★ Work on your hobby or do some crafts.
- ★ Write in a journal.
- ★ Sketch, paint, or draw funny cartoons.
- ★ Make music or listen to your favorite tunes.
- ★ Grab a hunk of clay: pound it out, shape it, sculpt it.



- ★ Dig around in a garden or sandbox. (Ask if it's okay.)



- ★ Find a quiet place where you can go to feel peaceful (under a tree, in your closet, on a park bench).
- ★ Talk to someone you trust about your feelings.

- ★ Spend time enjoying nature.



- ★ Read a book or magazine.



- ★ Love your pet.
- ★ Write letters or emails to people you care about.

- ★ Volunteer—helping someone else is a great way to feel good about yourself and the world.
- ★ Do some deep breathing to relax. Start by breathing in and imagining your breath is a wave: it comes in through your toes and washes up through your body and all the way to the top of your head. Count to five slowly as you do this. Then breathe out, counting backward from five, slowly. Picture the wave washing back down through your body, down to your toes, and out to sea. Continue breathing like this for a few minutes, or as long as you like. You'll know you're taking deep breaths if your belly rises and falls as you breathe in and out.



4. Be sweet

If you want to get along better with a sib, try this experiment. For one week, do your best to be as nice as you can be to your brother or sister, even if he or she isn't being so nice to you.

Here are some examples:

- Say “Hi,” “Good morning,” and “Goodnight.”
- Ask your sib, “How’s it going?” or “What’s up?”
- Offer to help with homework or chores.



- Give at least one compliment a day:
“Cool hair, dude.”
- When you say good-bye, add something like,
“Have a good day!”
- If you notice that your sib is in a bad mood, instead of calling him or her Crankenstein, ask,
“Is everything okay? Anything I can do to help?”
- Be encouraging: “Way to go,” “Nice job,”
“Good try!”

During the week, try not to criticize, tease, or fight. At the end of the week, think about how the experiment went. Did you notice a positive difference? If the answer is yes, then you’ve discovered the secret to getting along!



5. Rinse. Repeat.*

You've been reading about lots of ways to get along with sibs and make your relationship stronger. You've also learned tips for improving family communication. And ***presto-chango!*** Now your family is perfect, and you and your sibs never, ever fight—right?

Okay, probably not.



*The instructions on shampoo bottles used to always recommend “Wash. Rinse. Repeat.” Why? Maybe the Shampoo Geniuses thought everyone had really dirty hair—or maybe they just wanted to sell more shampoo. Whether you wash your hair twice or not, we’d like you to think about the idea of “Repeat.” As in: “Do it again.” Sometimes even: “Again and again.” Repeating a positive action can be helpful because it’s a form of *practice*. Practice leads to success.

Making changes takes time and repeated effort. Don't give something one try only and expect it to work just the way you wanted. One family meeting, for example, won't be enough. And you'll need to take a walk in your sib's shoes (looking at something from his or her point of view) more than once, too. The experiment about "being sweet" to your sib lasts for a week—but you can repeat it as often as needed, until being kind becomes a habit at home.

Keep trying and don't give up. Whenever you need encouragement, talk to a parent or another adult you trust.

