



Taming the Jealous Monster

When she saw her parents hug each other, three-year-old Marnie would often squeeze herself in between them so she could be part of the hug too. Or she would be playing happily by herself but as soon as her mom started talking to someone on the phone, Marnie would ask for a drink or do something she knew she wasn't allowed to do. She was jealous and wanted the attention her parents were giving each other and the person on the phone.

Jealousy, a completely normal emotion in young children (and older ones too!), often expresses itself in other ways too, such as anger, withdrawal, and aggressive behavior toward others.

Causes of Jealousy

- A new baby or new significant other in a parent's life; lack of enough individual attention.

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- Desire for something someone else has that the child doesn't have and wants (toy, ability, opportunity to do something or go somewhere).
- Fears and insecurities.
- Spend quality time with each child individually (times when the child does not have to share you with anyone else), and treat each child as an individual with his or her own unique strengths, special qualities and abilities.

Tips for Handling Jealousy

- Help the child understand and label the emotions and why he or she feels that way.
- Share your own struggles with jealousy and how you handle it.
- Focus on the positive (what the child has, rather than what he or she does not have) and on the child's strengths (what the child can do, what you love about your child).
- Don't buy things just because your child is jealous of something someone else has.
- Acknowledge the value of differences; e.g., it's a good thing that not everyone is the same.
- Apply rules equally to each child (with age-appropriate adaptations).
- Don't encourage comparisons with others that emphasize what they have and you don't.
- Help the child begin to understand that life is not always fair, many people have even less than he or she does, and it's important to focus on the positives of what they do have.

R E S O U R C E S

How to Help Your Child Recognize and Understand Jealousy. Challenging Behavior. <http://bit.ly/2IVRrLs>

9 ways parents can help kids cope with jealousy. The Washington Post. <https://wapo.st/2m2w76K>

Handling Your Child's Jealousy. Psychology Today. <http://bit.ly/2IWTOO4>

Programs and families can contact the program leadership directly at PAIECMH@pakeys.org with questions or concerns.

