

The Top Ten Ways to Create Problems in Your Adult Sibling Relationships

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In the marriage and family therapy field, I come across several different kinds of family relationships, but the sibling relationship is the most interesting to me. Your sibling is the best friend you were born with, yet it is fairly easy to cause problems in said relationship.

If you are looking to add some drama to your sibling relationship or you feel there is not enough distance in your relationship, do not fret. While there are countless ways to cause problems in the relationship, I have narrowed it down to the top ten (*note: these do not rank in any particular order*).

1. Do not reach out to the sibling. Technology has created so many different avenues for people to contact each other without having to meet face to face. Unfortunately, this also means that the ‘not having any time’ excuse goes out the window! Sending texts, a quick FaceTime or a Facebook message are all quick and easy ways to reach out, but you must resist. Not reaching out, especially when there are so many ways to do so is the best way to create distance in the relationship.

2. Be unforgiving, hold grudges, and/or resentment with trivial matters. Remember that time your twin sister stole your boyfriend in the sixth grade? You are totally justified in still being upset over that one. So what if the boyfriend turned out to be a really crummy person? It is about the principle and you never got an apology. Keep holding that anger in and there will definitely be a rift with that sibling.

3. Glorify your own accomplishments whenever you get the chance, but be sure to also diminish your sibling’s accomplishments. This can be tricky. If you want your sibling to be happy for your accomplishments, then expressing them in a joyful and informative manner is just the way to do that. But, if you truly want to inspire jealousy, you must boast about your accomplishments. If your sibling says, “I got a promotion at work,” you should definitely respond by stating that your promotion is with a better-known company and it only took you six months whereas it took him or her seven.

4. Be completely disrespectful, or even better, be condescending. R-E-S-P-E-C-T is boring and a critical component to functional sibling relationships. Therefore, I vote D-I-S-R-E-S-P-E-C-T. For clarity on how to be condescending, see the example above.

5. When your sibling tries to address the issues in your relationship, be defensive. This is where you must hold strong. There is no chance that you have any responsibility in the problems your sibling is trying to address. The best way to make sure your sibling understands where the blame lies is by refusing to see their view of the situation.

6. Blame your sibling for parental favoritism or other successes in their lives. Jan had it right on *The Brady Brunch* – “Marsha, Marsha, Marsha” really did have it all and was the clear favorite. Your sibling should be the one to make him or herself less accomplished, or attractive – it is only fair.

7. Discredit your sibling’s reactions. “You are overreacting!” “You are blowing this way out of proportion!” “It was a huge deal, how could you be stupid enough not to realize that?” “Are you seriously crying right now?” (The last one is my personal favorite in causing arguments).

(over)



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8. Never offer to help out or be involved in your sibling's life. Or when you do, be sure to nitpick and micromanage (bonus points if you are telling them how to parent).

9. Do not put any effort into something that is important to them if it is unimportant for you. Sure, they helped you with your résumé when you graduated from college, but there is no way you are watching his dog for a weekend while he goes to some conference. For all you know that conference is fake and you should not have to limit your free time.

10. Complain about their significant others. Or, better yet, tell your sibling that their taste in men/women/other is just really bad. Also, if the relationship dissolves, do not be there for your sibling(s), instead use the opportunity to tell them "told you so."

If you practice at least two or three of these tips, you will definitely cause a substantial amount of problems in your sibling relationship! But seriously, if you feel you have gone too far (maybe you are an overachiever and went for all ten!) you can always call us at New Leaf Resources and speak to a therapist about your relationship.

Siblings are an integral part of the family system, but can be difficult to maintain in adulthood. This is completely normal, but when the relationship is completely problem-saturated or abusive, therapy is a safe place to discuss all the issues you've worked so hard to create.