

Why Fair Doesn't Mean Equal

 imom.com/why-fair-doesnt-mean-equal/

Every parent has heard the disgruntled protest of one child when another is granted a privilege or asked to perform a different kind of chore.

"That's not fair!"

"What about him?!"

Comparison between siblings often stems from a faulty belief that fair means equal. "If my little brother gets a privilege, then I should get one too." Or, "When I was younger, you were much harder on me than you are with my little sister." Kids need to learn an important fact about life and parents usually have ample opportunities to teach it. Fair doesn't mean equal. In fact, equality often becomes the enemy of fairness.

Sometimes parents contribute to the competition and comparison in their children by trying to treat their children equally. If William gets new shoes, we buy shoes for his sister too. If she gets new markers, then we buy some for William as well. Children quickly get the idea and use the inequities of life to try to get what they want. An important characteristic of a good Biblical parenting philosophy is the ability to minimize competition and comparison by treating children uniquely instead of equally.

It doesn't take long to realize that you can't reasonably treat your children the same. You must treat them differently because they have unique needs, personalities, and strengths. A younger child may stay up later than an older brother because she's still taking naps and doesn't need to go to bed as early as he does. That's not unfair. It's treating your children according to their needs.

1. When children compare themselves to each other, they say they want equality, but that's not really true.

What each child really wants is to feel special. When you treat them uniquely, and focus on each child independently, you'll be surprised how much the comparison and competition decreases in your family.

2. If you have trouble with comparison and competition with your children, you may want to emphasize their individuality.

Intentionally give them different privileges, assignments, and responsibilities. Avoid grouping the children by saying things like, "Kids, it's time to eat," or "Boys, let's get in the car." Instead, use each person's name and give separate instructions. "Tori, please wash your hands and come to dinner." "Andre, please help me finish setting the table."

3. Teach your children that you don't even try to treat them the same.

If a brother sees his sister receiving a reward, and he wants one, too, you could say, "Your sister is working on something in her life, and the reward is for her progress and effort. If you want to work on a character quality in your life, let me know, and I'll think of a reward for you too." Think of it along the lines of spiritual gifts: God gives each person a different one. He loves us, and, because of that, He treats us uniquely.

4. "Everyone's doing it."

This is a tried-and-true kid attempt to manipulate you to give in to a request. This is actually saying, "If all my friends are able to do something, it would be unfair for me not to be able to do it." First, remind your child that different families have different values. As parents, we need to decide what values and convictions we're going to use to determine the rules and expectations for our own families. Second, not everyone else is doing it. There are many families that set guidelines similar to or even stricter than yours. Children have a tendency to find more permissive families to compare themselves to, so they can ask for more.

Don't let your children manipulate you with, "That's not fair." Instead, use the opportunity to teach them that you're making decisions for each person individually based on what you believe to be best.