

Ask Miriam...

Individuals and families in the community are faced with challenging issues and concerns regarding their social, emotional and psychological health. Through the cooperation of **The Jewish World**, Miriam Adler of the Jewish Family Services will offer responses.

Q. Dear Miriam,

We have two children who are 10 and 14. We have noticed that our ten-year-old is "acting much older." This would be fine if the ways in which she was "acting older" were positive. She has started using language that we are not happy with and exploring sites on the Internet that we do not approve of.

We have noticed that some of her friends who always came to our house are not coming over very often.

Our older child is a typical teenager, but not a problem.

Where is our younger daughter's behavior coming from?

Confused Parents

A. Dear Confused Parents,

It is not uncommon for younger children to use their older siblings as role models. They pick up both desirable and undesirable behaviors. When your older child was her sister's age, you had much more control of and access to outside influences. While your older child seems able to handle what she is exposed to, your younger child is not. You need to monitor your younger child in the same way you did her older sister.

Without being critical, try to help your older child understand that what is ok for her may not be ok for her sibling and she needs to be aware of the influence she has. Finally, your younger daughter needs to hear from you about the limits on her behavior and the expectations you have for age appropriate behaviors.

This is an all-family project.

Q. Dear Miriam,

We are a family of five, my husband and I and two sons, 15 and 8, and a daughter who is 12. Starting this fall, the

school has been in communication with us about our youngest son. They are indicating that he is bullying his classmates.

We spoke with him about this, but the school reports that the behavior has continued.

We don't understand what is happening since we do not see this behavior at home and neither of our other children behaves in this manner.

We would like to know what are some of the things that contribute to this kind of behavior.

Stymied Parents

A. Dear Stymied Parents,

Your situation may be related to sibling rivalry. Children in any family normally vie for parents' attention. An older child can influence a younger sibling to engage in negative behaviors because he/she models them or wants the younger sibling not to be seen in a positive way by the parents. Observe the interactions between your children in your home.

Spend a little more time with your older children to see if you pick up on any feelings of jealousy. What do they say about their younger brother.

Sometimes parents make the assumption that as their children grow and become more competent, they don't want parents involved. The nature of the involvement may change, but children continue to want and need connection to parents.

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Miriam Adler, A.C.S.W., C.S.W., is assistant director of J.F.S. She answers most frequently asked questions. Please send questions to "Ask Miriam," c/o Jewish Family Services of NENY, 877 Madison Ave., Albany, NY 12208 or e-mail madler@jfsneny.org or call 518-482-8856.

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