

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**, Jewish Family Services will offer responses.

Q. Dear Miriam,

We have two children ages 9 and 11. Our children have very different interests, one is into sports and everything connected with the outdoors. Our other son is an avid reader and amateur engineer, often putting designs to paper and creating devices.

Our dilemma is how to give our time equally to both and their varied interests.

It is Little League season and that is our primary activity now. A lot of time is going to the practices and games.

How can we be sure that our other son is not being neglected?

Little League Parents

A. Dear Little League Parents,

Understand that meeting your children's needs is not necessarily providing equal time to each of them and their activities. Don't make assumptions about how they might feel. Ask for their feedback. Of course, if you ask for feedback, you have to be prepared to listen to it.

In almost every family, parents connect differently with each of their children.

Which parent is more inclined toward sports and outdoors? This parent could be the main support of that activity. Some activities are seasonal or time-limited and need greater parental input at certain times.

While it is valuable for families to do things together just to show support for each other, it does not have to happen at every activity.

Celebrate with each of your children their interests and abilities. The quality of the time, rather than the amount, is often the most crucial factor.

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Q. Dear Miriam,

We are parents of curious capable kids. Our three children are 16, 13, and 8.

We are concerned about the influence of our oldest son on the middle son.

Our middle son has been coming to us with questions about sex that we think are not the usual for a 13-year-old. He won't tell us why he is asking these questions, but he is obviously uncomfortable with what he is hearing or seeing.

How can we handle this in the best way?

Concerned Parents

A. Dear Concerned Parents,

It is likely that your older son is active on the internet, perhaps on sites that should be blocked. What parents don't realize is how much more younger siblings are exposed to at an earlier age because of the influence of an older brother or sister. It is time for you to have a serious discussion with your oldest son to find out what information he is getting and how it is upsetting to his younger brother.

You need to have an understanding about what you will allow in your home. Yes, he can get internet access outside of the home, but you are establishing and reinforcing your values. Each successive child learns at an earlier age than the next older one.

Make sure that your family spends time discussing what is not okay about explicit sexual materials and why you are opposed to them. At the same time, make yourselves available to provide information to your children so the facts can be combined within an ethical framework.

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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.