

ELDEST CHILD IS NOT THE PARENT

PARENTING CHALLENGES ★ PAGE 1 OF 1

The first-born child often has many expectations placed upon him or her, one of which is to be a part-time parent. Some children take this job more seriously than others.

It is not good for either child when one child bosses the other one around. Constant criticism harms—in that the child who is being criticized begins to believe that he/she can't do anything right or good enough. It is very difficult to do better when the people who love you constantly say, not good enough. If a child who is learning how to be in the world does not have a place (home) in which to be him/herself without excess criticism—there is no safe place for that child in which to grow.

An older sibling needs to be told the PROBLEM (You are constantly criticizing your brother/sister.), the new RULE (You are not to criticize your brother/sister any more.) and the SOLUTION, (Your brother/sister needs to have a safe place in which to be him/herself. Each time you choose to criticize him/her, you will have one strike. At two strikes, you will have volunteered for a chore or ten push-ups. The consequence is meant to get your attention so you break the habit of always criticizing your brother/sister).

When the older child says, "But he acts so goofy!", or some other criticism, say, "I am sure that comment comes from caring about your brother and not wanting him to be hurt with his peers. It is my job to teach him how to be in the world, it is your job to support him while he learns. From now on, please leave the correcting and labeling to me."

Constant criticism is not loving; it is not helping the child to whom it is directed. Constant criticism erodes the child's sense of self and therefore leaves him or her powerless. We had a rule in our home that had amazing results: We are always kind to each other. Name-calling is not kind, criticism is not kind, hitting is not kind. (You can't use this one if you spank or hit your children.)

*See Sandy's Parenting Truths, Name Calling, Fighting and Conflict Resolution techniques for more information on handling these questions about power.