1. **Friendships Between Brothers and Sisters**

Although it is somewhat difficult to achieve, siblings are capable of and should aspire to being friends. There exist siblings who are friends but there also exist siblings who are separated by rivalry, fights, and animosity. There are people who share more affectionate relationships with friends than with their own siblings.

The possibility of developing friendship among siblings is great. Aristotle notes many factors which favor this friendship: having been born into the same family, having grown up together, having been educated alike. In addition to these factors, which are true of all siblings, there exist two other necessary ones, found only in families: that the children be virtuous and close in age.

Based on their biological nature, siblings share a reciprocal affection that develops from years of living together. However, most of the time this affection results in simply the becoming more acquainted.

Aristotle maintains that “the friendship that exists between siblings is similar to that which exists amongst peers.” Vazquez de Prada shares the same opinion: “Frequently relationships do not develop further due to a misguided urgency to keep one’s thoughts to one’s self. Personal thoughts are less likely to be revealed by one’s companions than by those in the home. It is better to say that outsiders only know bits and pieces while in the home it is impossible to have ‘half secrets.’”

It appears that between siblings there is greater resistance to confiding in one another than among friends. The reason is obvious: friends keep secrets better than siblings. No one shares something intimate knowing the person will pass it on to others (“others” being parents and the other siblings).

Possibly, lack of confidentiality among siblings may be attributed to the intensity or family life. It is not easy to maintain silence in matters concerning those we live with so intimately (parents and siblings).

As a result, the relationship among siblings is reduced to that of acquaintances; lacking in the indispensable condition of friendship “baring one’s to the other, communicating intimate thoughts. Here we have an objective to achieve in family enrichment: that siblings learn to confide in one another and to respect these secrets. They must learn that not everything a sibling shares should be communicated within or outside of the family.

It is the parents’ role to prevent and resolve a factor that hamper friendship among siblings, which has been referred to, the conflicts among siblings. What role should parents be expected to play in this matter?

2. **Why Conflicts Arise Amongst Siblings**

In the first place, it is important that parents not exaggerate the importance of such conflicts. There exists the possibility of arriving at false conclusions such as “they do not love one another”, “we have failed in their upbringing”, etc. When a situation is blown out of proportion the conflict becomes more complicated and the solution more difficult to achieve.
It is helpful that parents bear in mind that tensions and difficulties are almost inevitable in daily family life. With respect to “siblings, there are other factors that influence daily living, i.e., age, sex, and character. There exists a competitive tendency among siblings that may result in rivalry and jealousy. Siblings must also learn to share the affection of their parents as well as the material use of the home.

Tension among siblings occurs because they have yet to master the difficult art of daily living, which requires the development of certain virtues, such as respect, understanding, justice, sincerity, loyalty etc. Parents must focus on the long-term goals - the development of virtues necessary for daily life - rather than the immediate problems that arise from tensions.

Tension among siblings is almost a necessary price to pay in order to learn how to live with one another. Through these experiences, children learn to recognize injustice and defend themselves from it. These conflicts also provide opportunities to learn to confront other difficulties one’s children will encounter outside the family.

Personality development, accelerated during adolescence, also provides cause for many family tensions.

3. THE ROLE PARENTS PLAY TO HELP PREVENT CONFLICTS

I must reiterate that parents, with their understanding outlook and broad point of view, must strive to prevent superficial and occasional conflicts from developing into permanent misunderstandings. They should take advantage of these incidents to help their children mature further. However, this does not mean that conflicts in and of themselves are desirable. Nor should parents be negligent in disciplining and directly their children when problems do arise (especially in the face of serious conflict or when the cause stems from jealousy or envy).

Parents play an educational role in both the prevention and solution of problems that arise among siblings.

The preventative role is quite broad. One method is aimed at avoiding idleness that leads to boredom. Tension is frequent when children are idle and grow bored. It is fundamental that their free time be filled with activities that cultivate individual interests as well as require help in domestic chores.

Fostering individual interests (reading, music, collections, sports, etc.) distracts one’s children from focusing on possessions (difficulty in sharing creates many problems). By participating in common activities and family chores, children are given an opportunity to cooperate (for example, that they share the responsibility of organizing family albums, etc.).

It is helpful for parents to speak individually with each child so as to foster ideas of love and encourage generosity among siblings. For example, that they attend to details of service & help; that they learn to put up with one another in difficult moments; that they respect the taste and interests of others; that they learn to ask pardon and forgive, etc.

If parents concern themselves that their children feel loved and important within the family, then rivalry, jealousy and envy will be lessened. Parents must not have favorites, nor draw comparisons among siblings. The same opportunity must be given to each children to achieve what they want. Participating in family activities (such as excursions, get-togethers, etc.), and creating a sense of humor within the family (to not take one another so seriously) creates an environment that lends itself to unity among one’s children. The parents’ example will assure that this structure is built on solid ground, so as not to crumble. Harmony among parents and child, as well as in matrimonial matters, provides this solid foundation.
4. THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN THE FACE OF CONFLICT

Parents must intervene by correcting their children when problems do arise. However, parents need not intervene on every occasion. When a problem is serious and can only be resolved with parental guidance, one must step in. Aside from these occasions, it is beneficial that children be given the opportunity to solve their own problems.

When parental intervention is necessary, it is not advisable for parents to present the solution. On the contrary it is important to require the children to come up with the answer. At other times, parents may resolve the conflict through a discussion directed or moderated by them.

Such a discussion should follow certain guidelines: that siblings listen to one another; that each attempt to discover their own faults; that no one scream or show any lack of respect, etc. It is helpful for siblings to have the opportunity to reflect and calm down before participating in the conversation. During that time, the parents can talk separately with each child so as to clarify the situation. They can help each one to understand, the point of view of the other, and awaken in them a sense of understanding and generosity. This conversation should be warm and appropriate to the age, sex and character of each child. Such an attitude is fostered by approaching one’s child without prejudice or preconceived ideas. It is destructive to view a child as the “trouble maker” in the family. Attitudes such as this weaken objectivity on the part of the parents.

An outlook such as the one discussed provides an opportunity for growth within normal family conflicts. The initial confrontation becomes an opportunity to know one another better, and understand and help one another. In the long run, much depends on the attitude of the parents when problems arise. They should exercise prudence in order not to precipitate decisions or offend a specific child. They should also show serenity in the face of problems, and not favor either side.

In conclusion, it is important that parents be aware of and enhance the natural friendship between their children by creating and placing them in situations of mutual help and a sense of unity that foster personal relationships between one’s children. By interacting with one another they will discover the personal qualities of the other and no longer view one another as “the brother” but rather as a unique person. Thus, they will learn to confide in one another and develop friendship.

Brotherly love will be enhanced with a new ingredient: friendship. It is not a matter of forgetting blood ties in order to become friends, but rather of loving one another better and more profoundly. In order to make this a reality they need to learn to confide in one another, thus arriving at friendship.