Children's jealousy not unusual

By RAY WESTBROOK

Sibling rivalry is so pervasive a form of jealousy that it can spring to life even when there are no brothers or sisters.

Sybil Hart, Texas Tech professor of human development and author of "Preventing Sibling Rivalry," has encountered explosive instances in which a toddler tried to poke the eyes of a doll held by his mother.

But such fiery displays of emotion are not considered unusual in babies and toddlers, according to her research.

"Jealousy isn't something like blond hair or brown eyes, it's more like intelligence — everybody has some," said Hart, professor of human development and family studies in the College of Human Sciences. The college is celebrating Human Sciences Week 2001 on Monday through Wednesday.

"As far as I can tell, intense jealousy is not abnormal in a 12-month-old," she said. "It's just a baby who really loves his mom — that's all. But in a 3- or 4-year-old, it might be something quite different."

Hart said some responses triggered by a mother holding a doll are not only intense, but instantaneous.

"It is as if you flipped a switch. There are children who just leap to their feet, bolt to the mother and rip the little doll's head back. Then when they see it's a doll, they calm down."

She added, "One child bolted toward his mother and sank his little teeth into her thigh. And it was a lovely, sweet, darling child who wasn't cranky or irritable.

"They were lovely, cute babies who got really upset."

Hart is scheduled to appear on NBC's "Today" show Thursday morning, the same day her new book on sibling rivalry will be released to the public.

She has been conducting primary research into sibling rivalry for a number of years. A portion of that research occurred spontaneously by observing her own children plus those of day-care centers she once directed. The remainder, in studies conducted at the University of Miami's medical school and as a developmental psychologist, dealt with what is essentially a new area of research — jealousies among well-adjusted, normal children.

Hart is continuing her research through support from the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center pediatrics department. For lab sessions there, she is looking for input from Lubbock-area mothers with 6-month-old babies. Information is available by calling 723-2474.

According to Hart, the primary audience for her book, "Preventing Sibling Rivalry," is parents, but applications are expected to be helpful to therapists, pediatricians and psychologists.

It is written with a love for children and contains sprinklings of humor along with recommendations for encouraging friendship among siblings.

"If two kids really love each other, if they really get support in times of need from each other, that will be the great energy that suppresses jealousy," she said.

Chapter 10 of the book, containing jealousy profiles of young children, was excerpted in the February issue of Parenting magazine.


Hart hasn't been told what portion of the "Today" show her interview will be in, but thinks it is an honor to appear on the national program.

"I hope the book helps people," she said.

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PREVENTING SIBLING RIVALRY

Heather Carrington, left, Texas Tech graduate student, and Sybil Hart, professor of human development and family studies in the College of Human Sciences, conduct studies involving young children. Hart is author of the new book “Preventing Sibling Rivalry.”