

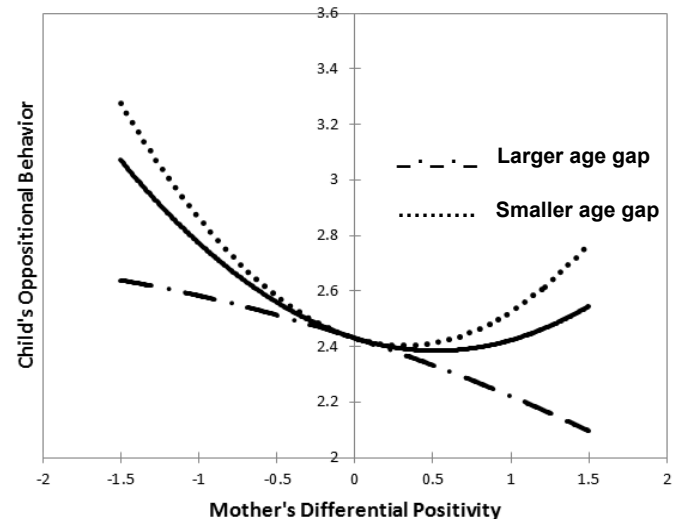
# Playing favorites is bad for everyone

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Psychologists have long acknowledged that children who are disfavored, relative to their siblings, experience poorer mental health outcomes. That is, kids who are at a place of disadvantage within the family tend to be more aggressive, more defiant, and less able to manage their emotions. However, the consequences playing favorites for other members of the family has not been clear.

In a study recently published in the journal of *Developmental Psychology*, psychologist Jean-Christophe Meunier and his colleagues at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education tested to see if playing favorites, as a family style, has negative consequences for all children in the family, rather than just the disfavored child.

As part of the Kids, Families, & Places project, led by Dr. Jennifer Jenkins at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Meunier and colleagues assessed the parenting practices (for mothers and fathers) and child behavioral problems of 599 multi-child families. Authors found that high levels of differential treatment were problematic for both favored and disfavored children, with the strongest effects evident when children are



close in age. Similar results were observed for mothers and fathers, as well. Authors conclude that when parental warmth, love and affection is not equitably allocated, levels of competition increase, causing both siblings to vie for - or maintain - the favored position. Regardless of the explanation, however, it seems that equitable families have kids who are less oppositional.



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