

# The Green-eyed monster

Jealousy and envy are both described by the same phrases and often mixed up with one another. **SC** shares what you need to know about children being bitten by the green-eyed monster and what you can do to help.



## Causes of jealousy

We usually associate jealous behaviours with children wanting the bigger and better pencil box that their friend has or desiring the same affection that a newly-arrived sibling gets. Though it may often seem that an event or new material possession is the reason for the feelings of jealousy being stirred up in your child, the main causes of jealousy are instead insecurity, unmet expectations and a sense of entitlement or selfishness, says Dr Geraldine Goh,

psychiatrist at the Child & Family Guidance Clinic, Gleneagle Hospital. She adds, "There often is the need to always be better than someone else."

Thus as the feeling is usually spurred from one person actually being in competition with another person, though the person that they are jealous of may not be aware or feel that it is of concern at all, jealousy is a feeling that may not be rational, says Geraldine Tan, psychologist, Center for Effective Living.



### Jealousy vs Envy

Jealousy and envy both belong in the same spectrum of negative emotions, both stemming from feelings of insecurity with oneself and hankering for what belongs to others, says Goh.

The fine difference between the two is that jealousy is resentment against a rival or another person enjoying success, while envy is the feeling of discontent to covetousness with regard to another's advantages or successes, shares Goh. "Jealousy is directed against another person as the subject of the negative feeling, while in envy, the subject is the object of desire."

For example, a jealous statement would be "It's not fair that you have this", while an envious statement would be "Your mother is so sweet to pack lunches for you", says Tan.

**Jealousy could possibly be a sign that there may be something more than the child is upset about, thus taking out time to talk to them is important.**

Envy tends to be more containable and even "solvable", where parents are able to buy objects to placate the envy in their child. When children are jealous, there is little that a parent can do to "fix it". However it is important to note that neither one is better or worse than the other.



### Behaviours of jealousy

Jealousy in children can manifest itself in a multitude of behaviours. "A child who is jealous of a new arrival may become aggressive and act out violently against a new baby or may swing to the other end of the extreme and become overly affectionate toward their new sibling, making everything about the new baby," says Goh, explaining that this overt affection is a coping mechanism, called reaction formation, which helps him cope with the negative emotions that he is feeling.

Stealing from or badmouthing another child are also ways that children express their jealousy, with some children even sabotaging their sibling's things to get them into trouble so that they can gloat over their misfortune, shares Tan. Children also often act out and purposefully display naughty behaviour just to get your attention or go to the other extreme of turning inward, becoming moody, disinterested and withdrawn, says Goh.

### Dealing with jealousy

Jealousy is an emotional issue that children will have to learn to negotiate. Thus when identifying jealousy in your child, assure him that the feelings are normal and teach him how to cope with it. However, jealousy could possibly be a sign that there may be something more that the child is upset about, thus taking out time to talk to them is important.

The best cure to jealousy is nurturing a secure child in a family culture of unconditional love in which one strives today to be better than himself compared to yesterday rather than to be better than the "Jones" next door, says Goh. Instead use the following tips to reassure and build up the feelings of security in your child.

#### Stop comparing him to other people

He is special, unique and you love him as he is, because he is him, your precious child. No one can take his place, thus as a parent don't make him feel less important through comparison.

#### Stop worrying about what other people may think

Assure him there he is not being graded by other people all the time, so he should not keep grading himself or grading others. There will always be things that others can do which he will be unable to and vice versa, thus it is pointless to compare.

#### Stop his negative thoughts and help him to focus on the positives in his life

This will help him keep things in perspective and see the big picture instead of focusing on the little bits that he does not have. ☆