What to say when your child says "You love her more"

"My ten-year-old keeps saying I love his little sister more and that everything is unfair. I don't, but nothing I say helps. What do I say?"

TAKE 1 · THE INSTINCT

"That's ridiculous. I love you both exactly the same, and I do loads for you. Stop being jealous."

TAKE 2 · TRY THIS INSTEAD

"It feels like I'm on her side more. Tell me when it felt like that. I want to hear it."

"You love her more" lands hard because it accuses you of the one thing you are sure you would never do. The instinct is to deny it and list everything you do for him. What the research on siblings suggests is less about proving equal love and more about whether a child can see the reasons for the differences.

What is known, and at what age

In a study by Kowal and Kramer, 61 children aged 11 to 13 and their siblings were asked about the ways their parents treated them. The children noticed differences in about a third of the situations, and judged those differences fair in about three-quarters of them, often because of a sibling's age or needs. Children who saw the differences as fair reported warmer, closer relationships with their brother or sister.

A later study of 135 children, around twelve on average, and their older siblings found that being on the receiving end of more parental control went with more behaviour problems. But when children judged the difference to be fair, they showed fewer signs of worry and low mood, and higher self-esteem.

What the words do

Take 1 calls the feeling ridiculous, so the next time he feels it, he keeps it to himself. Take 2 asks for the evidence and means it. Listen to the whole list. Some of it will be fair to own ("You're right, I've been sharper with you this week"). The rest is a difference you can explain. Saying the reason out loud is the part he was missing.

If you live in two homes

In two homes, "you love her more" can arrive with "Dad lets her" or "Mum always picks him." Answer the feeling in your own home, explain your own reasons, and don't compare the other parent's choices. If the same complaint comes from both homes, it is worth one calm conversation between the adults.

In the UK

If the jealousy comes with hitting, low mood or not wanting to be at home, talk to your GP or your child's school. In England and Wales, a child arrangements order may set out who a child lives with and when they spend time with each parent (older orders say "residence" and "contact"). Cafcass in England (Cafcass Cymru in Wales) advises the family court about what is safe for children; for everyday parenting questions, Coram Family Lives (England and Wales, 0808 800 2222) is free and confidential. Nothing on this page is legal advice.

Sources

1. Kowal, A., & Kramer, L. (1997). Children's understanding of parental differential treatment. Child Development, 68(1), 113–126.
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3. Cafcass (n.d.). About us. Retrieved November 9, 2026.
4. UK Parliament (2014). Children and Families Act 2014, section 12: Child arrangements orders.
5. Department for Education (2014). The Children and Families Act 2014 (Transitional Provisions) Order 2014, SI 2014/1042, article 6.
6. Welsh Government (n.d.). Cafcass Cymru. Retrieved November 9, 2026.
7. Coram Family Lives (n.d.). Confidential helpline. Retrieved November 9, 2026.

This is general information drawn from published research and pediatric guidance. It is not medical, psychological or legal advice. If you are worried about your child, talk to your doctor.