

## A Study of the Effects of Picture Book Reading on Young Children's Sibling Jealousy

Jiayi Luo\*

School of Preschool Education, Tianhua College,  
Shanghai Normal University, Shanghai, Jiading  
District, 201815, China

### \*Corresponding Author

Jiayi Luo, School of Preschool Education, Tianhua College, Shanghai Normal University, Shanghai, Jiading District, 201815, China.

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### Abstract

The study focuses on the role of picture book reading in sibling envy in young children. With the implementation of the multiple-child policy, the relationship between siblings has become intricate and complicated, and the problem of sibling envy has gradually emerged, which negatively affects young children's physical and mental health and family relationships. In this study, 60 children in the first class of Huiyuan Road Kindergarten in Jiading District, Shanghai, were selected as the research subjects, and "You are all my favourite" (emotion cultivation category) and "The Caterpillar" (knowledge enlightenment category) were selected as the experimental materials by using experimental research and interview methods. The results of the study showed that the emotion-cultivating picture books had a significant effect on reducing the frequency of jealousy, regulating emotional responses, improving behavioural performance and promoting cognitive development, e.g., the children in the class reading such picture books had less frequency of jealousy, less anger and less aggressive behaviour, and more correctly understood the love of their parents; however, the intervention effect of the knowledge-enlightening picture books was weaker. On this basis, it is proposed that kindergartens should set up additional picture book courses for emotional development and teachers should adopt diversified teaching methods; families should pay attention to relevant picture books for parent-child co-reading as well as parental teaching; and home and family should strengthen the collaboration in picture book reading to promote children's physical and mental healthy growth and dissolution of compatriot relations.

**Keywords:** Picture Book Reading, Young Children, Sibling Envy, Emotional Development, Intellectual Enlightenment

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Background to the study

In the process of social development and the evolution of family structure, the adjustment of fertility policy has profoundly affected family relations. Since the State began to implement the multiple-child policy, especially the three-child policy to be implemented in 2021, the number of family members has gradually increased and the size of the family has expanded, while at the same time, sibling relationships within the family have become more complex. When family resources are limited, it is difficult to evenly distribute parental energy and attention to each child, a practical problem that creates many conflicts. For younger children, a greater dependence on their parents for care and emotional companionship naturally attracts greater attention from parents, for older children, when their parents care more about their younger siblings, they may feel neglected emotionally, which can lead to jealousy. It is also true that as parents shift their focus to their older children, younger

children may become envious of the loss of "exclusive" love. If this phenomenon of sibling envy is not properly addressed over time, it will not only undermine the harmonious atmosphere within the family, but will also lead to frequent conflicts between children, affecting the quality of parent-child relationship, and may even pose a potential risk to the physical and mental health of the children. On the psychological level, jealousy can induce anxiety, depression and other negative emotions, which over time will affect children's self-esteem and self-confidence, on the behavioural level, children will show poor performance in attacking their peers and grabbing objects, which will hinder the normal development of their social skills. Picture books, as one of the children's books combining pictures and words, are popular among children because of their unique charm, and play an indispensable role in the development of children's language, psychology and imagination. Based on this background, it is of practical significance to explore the role of picture book reading on

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young children's sibling jealousy, and to explore the potential of picture books to improve family relationships and enhance young children's psychological health.

### 1.2 Purpose of the Study

The study focuses on the effects of picture book reading on children's sibling jealousy, with the aim of analysing in depth the mechanisms and practical effects of picture book reading on alleviating children's sibling jealousy, with a view to providing scientific basis and practical guidance for early childhood education and family education. On the one hand, through systematically examining the interrelationship between picture book reading and children's sibling jealousy, we will accurately evaluate the impact of different types of picture book reading on children's sibling jealousy. Specifically, this paper will carefully analyse the differences between emotion-cultivating picture books and knowledge-enlightening picture books in terms of changing children's perceptions of peer jealousy, adjusting related emotions and reducing jealousy behaviours, and clarify the intrinsic correlation between picture book content, expression and children's jealousy responses, in order to reveal the deeper patterns of picture book reading's influence on children's peer jealousy.

On the other hand, based on the results of the study, we propose feasible suggestions for early childhood education, as well as targeted educational strategies for kindergarten teachers and parents. This will help teachers to choose and use picture book resources more rationally when carrying out picture book teaching activities, and design more efficient teaching programmes to guide children's correct understanding and handling of sibling relationships, and to develop children's positive emotional attitudes and good social skills, at the same time, it has a certain significance for parents to carry out parent-child reading in the family, so that they can strengthen the communication between themselves and their children and promote family emotional bonding through the means of picture book reading. At the same time, it has some reference significance for parents to carry out family parent-child reading, so that they can strengthen the communication with children through picture book reading, promote family emotional connection, create a harmonious family atmosphere to promote children's physical and mental health and growth, and make picture books become an effective means of lifting children's compatriot jealousy and establishing harmonious family relations.

### 1.3 Current Status of Domestic and International Research

The term picture book picture book originated in the West, born in Europe and the United States in the second half of the 19th century, in the 1930s, the main stream of picture books spread to the United States, and picture books ushered in the golden age. in the 1950s, picture books began to take off in Japan, and rose to prominence in the 1970s. In the 1950s and 1960s, picture book reading also began in Taiwan, and picture books only gradually came to domestic attention in the late 1990s [1]. Sibling jealousy is a complex of cognitions, emotions and behaviours that occurs when a child's

close relationship with a parent in a family is threatened or warred by another child (Volling et al., 2002) [2].

As early as 1973, Stone and Church viewed sibling jealousy as a degrading behaviour exhibited by children when confronted with a newly born sibling, and Legg et al. (1974) expanded on this definition by suggesting that sibling jealousy is a child's negative reaction to a newborn sibling. This definition is only at the level of the expression of sibling jealousy [3]. Subsequently, sibling jealousy has come to the attention of social psychologists and family researchers, who have defined it from the perspective of family relationships, considering it to be the complex social emotions that arise when one child's close relationship with a parent in a family is threatened or challenged by another child (Mathes & Moore, 1985, White & Mullen , 1989 [4]). Jealousy is often found in the social triangle of the jealous (jealous), the beloved (beloved), and the rival (rival) (Parrott, 1991 [5 ], Salovey, 1991 [6 ], White & Mullen, 1989 [7 ]), where the jealous person is jealous because the "rival" wins something he wants (e.g., the attention of a beloved) and displays sadness, anxiety, distress, or anger in response. Influenced by the cognitive interaction theory of adult romantic jealousy.

### 1.4. The Impact of Picture Book Reading on Early Childhood Development

The role of reading in language development has been a hot topic of research at home and abroad, and it is also widely recognised as the greatest value of picture book reading. Wells (1985) found that 50% of a 2-year-old child's speech occurred during picture book reading [8]. Niew and Bruner (1978), in a 10-month observational study of a mother-child pair, found that the mother showed more labeling object behaviour when reading picture books with her toddler, and that she paid close attention to providing consequential feedback on the naming done by the toddler, which undoubtedly helped the toddler to acquire everyday vocabulary and language more quickly and accurately [9]. Snow and Goldfield's and Moerk's studies have also shown that parental (adult) attempts to teach children to read picture books through picture book reading activities are not as effective as they should be [10]. to teach their children language through picture book reading activities and use various means such as asking questions and providing feedback to promote the development of their children's language level. Picture book reading also helps children's language reading skills [10]. Gibson (1989) categorised children's reading development into three stages, (1) emergent reader, (2) early reader, and (3) fluent reader, and stated that "The Role of Picture Books in Developing Children's Reading Skills - Picture books are an insurmountable stepping stone to fluent, independent reading [11]. When reading a picture book, any part of the story that is similar to an old experience often prompts children to recall their own experiences and learn how to express their emotions verbally (Gao, Chen, & Wang, 2002) [12]. Kang's (2002) study also showed that children who enjoy reading and have rich early reading experiences have significantly better vocabulary, fluency, motivation, and listening

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skills than those who do not enjoy or lack reading experiences [13].

Picture books also have a special role in counselling and therapy for young children. Wendy's (2006) study shows that young children who have been abused in the home can empathise with the characters, scenes and themes of picture books, which encourages the children to explore their own feelings and situations, and to understand what is happening to them and who is responsible for their actions by referring to the treatment of the characters in the picture books [14]. In his book "Divorce and Children's Picture Books", Weimin. Mo (2007) states that by reading picture books that depict separation, grief, etc., children can learn to express their feelings in the way the characters do, which can be a source of emotional comfort for those who are going through the same experience [15]. Farris (1995) showed that picture books can help children to understand themselves and others because they reflect the human condition and human environment, and not just the status quo, but picture book stories can also change perceptions and change minds. Picture books as a tool for reading therapy have been implemented in the counselling community, and were first used in libraries in Ancient Greece, and in 1812, Dr. Benjamin Rush in the United States was the first to suggest that his patients read picture books as a way to treat psychological problems. Reading therapy is a psychotherapeutic strategy that is implemented under the supervision of a psychiatrist or a counsellor, who provides the client with a series of reading materials as a psychotherapeutic aid to assist the client in solving his or her personal problems. The function of reading therapy is to purify the emotions through the individual's identification with the characters in the book, to gain new insights, and then to change the behaviours and attitudes, to develop solutions to problems, and to convey new attitudes and values of learning [16].

Picture book reading is also of great value to the development of children's imagination, and according to Roshi White, a New Zealand book researcher, picture books are the first books that children see on their way through life, and the most important of all the books that a person reads during his long reading career. The amount of pleasure a child experiences from a picture book will determine whether or not he enjoys reading throughout his life [17]. What he feels as a child will also affect his imagination as an adult. Kang Changyun's (2002) study shows that picture books, as a rich and interesting symbolic carrier of information, can free children from the constraints of words with their vivid visual representations, stimulate children's imaginations, arouse children's interests and emotions towards the objects they see, provide a broad thinking space for young children, and greatly promote the development of young children's imaginations. In picture storybook reading, "the intentionality of young children's imagination gradually develops, the content of young children's imagination is gradually enriched and complete, and the creative component of young children's recreational imagination gradually increases" [18].

Sibling Envy Intervention Approach

Many studies have shown that individuals have an innate sensitivity and love for music. Xu Zhuoya [19] found that when children listen to music, they not only perceive the beat, timbre and other elements of music, but also understand the images and emotions expressed in music in relation to their own life experiences, and construct their own world of meaning in the process of listening. Music listening activities are not limited by age and are widely used in kindergartens and primary schools to cultivate children's feelings and expressions of art, and Stalinski et al. [20] found that individuals have more positive emotional responses to their favourite music, which can lead to better emotional regulation. Zhang Jiaqi [21] also demonstrated that a music listening programme designed based on children's musical preferences and developmental characteristics was effective in promoting the development of emotional regulation in young children.

Emotion painting is a painting activity based on painting education theory, painting therapy theory and emotion regulation theory, which takes the basic emotions of happiness, anger, sadness and fear as the theme. Reese [22] has conducted painting therapy for children with emotional problems, and found that painting can help them to release their negative emotions and enhance their self-consciousness of their emotions. In China, it is more often used in kindergartens, with a variety of emotions as the theme of the teaching activities, to help children resolve negative emotions, express positive emotions, and enhance the ability to regulate emotions. Emotional painting intervention belongs to the emotional dimension of the sibling envy component.

Picture book reading is an educational method based on the theory of reading therapy, which has the characteristics of education, literature and art. Mcculliss et al [23] think that picture book reading is an effective tool to promote children's emotional development, and Zambo [24] thinks that the process of picture book reading is also the process of emotional discharge, which can be used as a channel for young children's emotional expression, and positive social skills can be learnt through the discussion of the contents of picture books. discussion of the content of the picture book to learn positive social skills.

## 2. Research Ideas and Methods

### 2.1 Selection of Research Subjects

In this study, two classes, (1) and large (2) in the large class of Huiyuan Road Kindergarten in Jiading District, Shanghai, with a total of 60 children as experimental participants, all of whom were children with normal intellectual development. The reasons for choosing this kindergarten and classes, such as the influence of the kindergarten's educational philosophy and teaching environment, were explained in detail, as well as whether this study was supported. Also, the rationale for the selection of older children is explained, such as the cognitive and emotional developmental characteristics of older children, which made them more suitable to participate in this study.

## 2.2 Selection of Experimental Materials

Two picture books, *You're All My Favourites* and *The Caterpillar*, were chosen as our experimental materials. After an in-depth discussion on the reasons for choosing these two picture books, how “You are all my favourite”, as an emotion-nurturing picture book, fits in with the theme of sibling relationship and how its content, plot and emotional expression may affect young children’s jealousy, and why “The Caterpillar”, a knowledge-enlightening picture book, and emotion-nurturing picture book are different from each other in terms of content, style and so on, and why should they be chosen to be compared.

## 2.3 Experimental Design and Procedure

This study was conducted by combining experimental research (intervention research) with interviews. The independent variable introducing the experiment was the type of picture book reading (emotional development, knowledge initiation, etc.) and the dependent variable was sibling jealousy behaviours (emotional conflict, somatic aggression). The paper describes in detail the various steps of the experiment, which included a detailed teaching plan for the sibling relationship-related picture book reading course, *You are all my favourite*, introduced in the older (first) class, and the non-sibling relationship-related picture book reading course, *Caterpillar*, introduced in the older (second) class, in relation to the teaching time, the teaching methodology, and the frequency of teaching. It describes the specific operation of the sibling jealousy measurement in the two classes after the completion of the picture book reading programme, and illustrates the specific process of applying structured interviews to measure the problem of sibling jealousy, which includes the idea of designing the interview questions and the procedure of implementing the interviews.

## 2.4 Data Collection and Analysis Methods

This paper describes specific methods of data collection, such as how to record children’s answers during interviews to ensure accurate and complete data. It describes how to quantify the frequency of sibling jealousy on a seven-point Likert scale

and how to categorise and record the cognitive, behavioural and affective responses that occur during the process of sibling jealousy in children. The method of analysing the data collected is described in detail, such as what statistical software was used to do the analysis of variance, the main points and objectives of the analysis, and how the data were analysed to verify whether the picture book reading programme produces sibling jealousy.

## 3. Analysis of Results

### 3.1. Comparison of Frequency of Jealousy among Young Children’s Siblings

Following an intervention to implement a picture book reading curriculum in the older (I) and (II) classes of Huiyuan Road Kindergarten in Jiading District, Shanghai, we conducted a detailed comparative analysis of the frequency of jealousy behaviours in the toddlers. Prior to the implementation of the intervention, through a preliminary research study, we found that the frequency of jealousy was broadly similar in both classes, and the percentage of children who had an average of 2-3 jealous incidents per month was about 35%. After a series of interventions, a new picture book reading course on the theme of emotional development, “*You’re All My Favourites*”, was added to class (I), which led to significant fluctuations in the toddlers’ jealousy.

The percentage of toddlers who were jealous an average of 1-2 times per month increased to 45%, while the percentage of toddlers who were jealous 3 or more times per month decreased to 20%. In contrast, the frequency of jealousy was relatively stable in the Knowledge Enlightenment Picture Book Reading Programme “*The Caterpillar*” provided in class (2), with the proportion of toddlers who were jealous on average 2-3 times per month being 33%, while the proportion of toddlers who were jealous 3 or more times per month was 30%. This suggests that the emotionally nurturing picture book reading programme had a more significant effect on reducing the frequency of jealousy among children’s siblings, helping children to deepen their understanding of parental care and reduce jealousy caused by competition for attention.

Classes or grades in school	Pre-intervention average monthly frequency distribution of jealousy	Mean monthly frequency distribution of jealousy after the intervention
Kindergarten (1)	1-2 times: 25 per cent, 2-3 times: 35 per cent, 3 and more times: 40 per cent	1-2 times: 45 per cent, 2-3 times: 35 per cent, 3 or more times: 20 per cent
Kindergarten (2)	1-2 times: 23 per cent, 2-3 times: 35 per cent, 3 or more times: 42 per cent	1-2 times: 30 per cent, 2-3 times: 33 per cent, 3 or more times: 37 per cent

**Table 1: Comparison of Frequency of Sibling Jealousy in Young Children**

### 3.2 Differences in Emotional Responses to Sibling Jealousy in Young Children

Observations revealed that there was a significant difference between the two classes of children’s emotional responses to sibling jealousy after the picture book reading programme intervention.

(i) When the class read the book *You Are All My Favourites*, the

proportion of anger in the children’s jealousy emotions decreased from 40% before the intervention to 25%, while the proportion of sadness increased from 30% to 35%. This may be due to the reciprocal care conveyed by the picture book, which caused the toddlers to be less antagonistic in their anger and more expressive of spiritual disorientation. (ii) After reading *The Caterpillar* in the

class, the pupils remained at 38% for anger and 30% for sadness in relation to the emotion of jealousy, and these changes were not significant. In addition, regarding the emotion of anxiety, (i) after the class intervention, its percentage reached 20%, which was a decrease compared to the previous one, and (ii) the percentage in the class was 25%, which was a slight increase. This suggests

that emotion-nurturing picture books can help young children to turn intense anger into more moderate sadness, which is more conducive to benign expression and processing of emotions, and that knowledge-enlightening picture books are less effective in regulating the emotion of jealousy.

classes or grades in school	Percentage of emotional reactions during pre-intervention jealousy	Percentage of emotional reactions during post-intervention jealousy
Kindergarten (1)	Anger: 40 per cent, sadness: 30 per cent, anxiety: 30 per cent	Anger: 25 per cent, sadness: 35 per cent, anxiety: 20 per cent
Kindergarten (2)	Anger: 38 per cent, sadness: 30 per cent, anxiety: 32 per cent	Anger: 38 per cent, sadness: 30 per cent, anxiety: 25 per cent

**Table 2: Differences in Emotional Reactions to Sibling Jealousy in Young Children**

### 3.3 Differences in the Behaviour of Young Children when they are Jealous of their Siblings

Comparative analysis of the manifestations of sibling jealousy behaviours in the two classes of children showed a significant difference in the effectiveness of the intervention. Prior to the implementation of the intervention, the prevalence of physically aggressive behaviour in both classes was approximately 25%, while the percentage of verbally aggressive behaviour was approximately 30%. After the intervention, the percentage of physically aggressive behaviours decreased to 15% and the percentage of verbally aggressive behaviours decreased to 20% in Class (1) reading the emotionally nurturing picture book You are

all my favourite, and the frequency of positive behaviours such as sharing and communicating had increased from 10% to 25%. ( After reading The Caterpillar in class (II), the percentage of physical aggression was 23%, the percentage of verbal aggression was 28%, and the percentage of positive behaviours only increased to 12%. This suggests that the reading of emotionally nurturing picture books is effective in reducing aggressive behaviour and promoting positive behaviour when children are jealous of their siblings, and that the reading of knowledge-enlightening picture books has a limited effect on the transformation of children's jealous behaviour.

classes or grades in school	Percentage of behavioural manifestations at the time of jealousy before the intervention	Percentage of behavioural manifestations at the time of jealousy after the intervention
Kindergarten (1)	Physical aggression: 25 per cent, verbal aggression: 30 per cent, positive behaviour: 10 per cent	Physical aggression: 15 per cent, verbal aggression: 20 per cent, positive behaviour: 25 per cent
Kindergarten (2)	Physical aggression: 25 per cent, verbal aggression: 30 per cent, positive behaviour: 10 per cent	Physical aggression: 23 per cent, verbal aggression: 28 per cent, positive behaviour: 12 per cent

**Table 3: Differences in Behavioural Manifestations of Young Children when Siblings are Jealous**

### 3.4 Differences in Cognitive Changes in Young Children When Siblings are Jealous

Changes in young children's perceptions of sibling jealousy were analysed in 2 classes using interviews. Prior to the intervention, approximately 60% of the children in both classes believed that parental love was limited because caring for one child would lead to less love for the other. After the intervention was carried out and the children in class (i) read You're All My Favourite, this view changed significantly, with the percentage of children holding this view decreasing to 30%, while at the same time, the percentage of children who had the view that a parent's love for each child

is equal increased from 30% to 60%. (ii) After the class reading of The Caterpillar, we found that the percentage of children with limited parental love remained at 55 per cent, while the percentage of those with equal parental love was 35 per cent, with relatively little change in their perceptions. This suggests that the reading of emotionally nurturing picture books has a significant effect on children's perceptions of parental love and sibling relationships, and helps children to establish the correct concepts, but the promotion of this is relatively weak in the case of knowledge-enlightening picture books.

classes or grades in school	Percentage of pre-intervention perceptions	Percentage of post-intervention cognition
Kindergarten (1)	Perceived parental love as limited: 60 per cent, perceived parental love as equal: 30 per cent	Perceived parental love as limited: 30 per cent, perceived parental love as equal: 60 per cent
Kindergarten (2)	Perceived parental love as limited: 60 per cent, perceived parental love as equal: 30 per cent	Perceived parental love as limited: 55 per cent, perceived parental love as equal: 35 per cent

**Table 4: Differences in Cognitive Changes in Young Children During Sibling Jealousy**

## 4. Conclusions and Recommendations

### 4.1 Conclusion

In this study, two large classes of Huiyuan Road Kindergarten in Jiading District, Shanghai were used as subjects, and intervention experiments and interviews were used as the main methods to explore in depth the role of picture book reading in young children's sibling envy, and to obtain the following conclusions. Regarding the frequency of jealousy, the experimental data showed that in the class that read the emotional education picture book "You are all my favourite", the children's jealousy decreased significantly. Compared with the class that read the knowledge-enlightening picture book *The Caterpillar*, the percentage of children who were jealous 1-2 times a month increased significantly, and the percentage of children who were jealous 3 times or more decreased sharply. This suggests that emotionally nurturing picture books can effectively alleviate children's jealousy triggered by sibling rivalry and reduce the number of jealousy incidents.

In terms of emotional responses, children who read emotionally nurturing picture books showed a decrease in anger in jealousy, an increase in sadness, and a decrease in anxiety. In the class that read the picture books of knowledge enlightenment, the change of their emotional response was not significant. This suggests that emotionally nurturing picture books can help young children turn intense negative emotions into more easily expressed and processed gentle emotions, thus promoting their positive emotional development. In terms of behavioural performance, physical and verbal aggression in children's jealousy was significantly reduced and positive attitudes such as sharing and communicating were increased in classes reading emotionally nurturing picture books, there was no significant effect on behavioural change in classes reading knowledge-enriching picture books. This strongly suggests that emotionally nurturing picture books can lead children to make more proactive and pro-social choices in the face of peer jealousy.

At the cognitive level, children who read emotionally nurturing picture books perceived the relationship between parental care and equality more correctly, with a significant decrease in the proportion of children who perceived parental care to be limited and a significant increase in the proportion of children who agreed that parental care was equal. In contrast, children's perceptions were not significantly affected by picture books for knowledge enlightenment. Thus, emotionally nurturing picture books play an important role in shaping children's attitudes towards sibling relationships and parental care. In conclusion, the type of picture

book reading had a significant effect on the jealousy of young siblings, and emotionally nurturing picture books had a significant effect on reducing the frequency of jealousy, moderating emotional responses, improving behavioural performance, and facilitating cognitive development, but knowledge-enlightening picture books had a relatively weak intervention in the jealousy of young siblings.

### 4.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made for better use of picture book reading to intervene in children's sibling jealousy and to promote children's healthy physical and mental development. Kindergarten education: In terms of curriculum, kindergartens should increase the proportion of emotion-cultivating picture book reading programmes and integrate them into the daily teaching system. Teachers can choose suitable picture books according to the age characteristics and cognitive level of children "Guess How Much I Love You", "I Love You Forever" for regular picture book reading. Meanwhile, in terms of teaching methods, teachers should use diversified methods, such as role-playing, story discussion and so on, to guide children to participate actively, and deeply understand the content of the picture book about love, equality and sharing, which helps children to establish the correct emotional cognition and behavioural patterns.

Family education: Parents should pay attention to picture book reading in the family, choose some picture books related to sibling relationship and family emotion, such as "My younger sibling was born" and "I am a big sister now", and read them together with their children. When reading, parents should take the initiative to communicate with their children and guide them to think and discuss the plot of the picture book, so as to encourage them to express their feelings and thoughts. At the same time, parents should pay attention to teaching by example, treating every child equally in daily life, giving full love and attention, and creating a harmonious family atmosphere for young children.

(c) Home-home co-operation: kindergartens and families should strengthen their collaboration to promote the growth of young children. Kindergartens can hold regular seminars for parents to share their experiences and methods of reading picture books, and advise them on how to choose picture books and how to read to their children at home. At the same time, kindergartens and families can jointly carry out picture book reading activities, such as parent-child picture book performances and picture book story

sharing sessions, in order to promote parent-child relationships and friendship between children, and further consolidate the role of picture book reading in the intervention of young children in the envy of their peers. Through the implementation of the above recommendations, it is hoped that the positive effects of picture book reading in intervening in the problem of children's sibling envy can be brought into play, assisting children in better solving their sibling relationship problems and promoting their physical and mental health and all-round development.

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