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Ask Mr. Dad: Base family rules on each child's needs

By Armin Brott, McClatchy-Tribune News Service

Dear Mr. Dad: *My older children — ages 11 and 12 — are constantly complaining that things aren't "fair" when it comes to the rules in our house. They say it's not right that their younger sibling (age 7) gets to enjoy many of the same benefits as they do, even though they're a lot older. For instance, bed time in our home is set for 9 p.m. on weeknights, which I feel is appropriate for the older and younger kids; but they don't agree.*

Answer: "It's not fair" is probably the most played card in the family deck. Part of the reason is that kids often see the word "fair" as a synonym for "the same," when, as most adults well know, there's a big difference between the two. In most cases, the kids are wrong about whether something is actually unfair or not. But in this case, I think they're making a good point. Bed times should be based upon age and the amount of sleep that your children need to function properly the next day. Most 10 and 11-year-olds don't need as much sleep as a 7-year-old, and scooting their bedtime as little as 30 minutes later could go a long way toward reestablishing their rightful place at the top of the food chain. It would also give you some wonderful extra time with your older kids.

Well, dear readers, Father's Day is this weekend. And if you haven't already taken a look at the most recent winners of the Mr. Dad Seal of Approval, you're really missing something. As always, we considered several dozen entries to find the products and services that facilitate father-child relationships and do the most to encourage dads and kids to spend quality time together.

These include:

ShredSled (theshredsled.com) — about as much fun as you can legally have on wheels.

CitiBlocs (CitiBlocs.com) — addictive building blocks for dads (okay, and kids too).

Pirates' Blast, boardgame from HabaUSA (habausa.com)

Rosetta Stone language learning courses (rosettastone.com)

A set of classic storybooks on DVD from Scholastic (newkideo.com)

You can find the complete list at www.mrdad.com/seal

Happy Father's Day!