**How to lessen the negative effects of favoritism** ByBrittany Wong

Last week, “Mom” actress Jaime Pressly drew the ire of many on the internet when she shared a photo of herself with her 12-year-old, Dezi, and noted that he’s her “favorite.” (She also has a pair of twins who are toddlers.)

“Best time ever hanging with my favorite son, Dezi. That’s right I said it,” Pressly wrote on Instagram ― adding that although she has “a favorite son,” she loves “all 3 of my boys with everything I have in me.” “Dez and I have a special bond that no one else will ever match because we’ve grown up together,” she wrote.

More often than not, parents have favorites not so much because of a deep appreciation for one particular kid, but because they’re overlooking the good in their other children, according to John Duffy, a psychologist and author of “Parenting the New Teen in the Age of Anxiety.”

“In many families ― mine included ― the rule follower is the most appreciated,” he said. “The child who pushes most against the grain is often least appreciated. If parents could find appreciation and admiration for the other child’s positive qualities, then more equity might be felt between all siblings.”

Monitoring your internal dialogue helps, too. “I would advise parents to clarify the difference between ‘favorite child’ and ‘child I’m drawn to most,’ and why,” Duffy said. “This allows for the unconditional love for each child across the board.”

If your children talk openly about who’s the favorite, you should address the elephant in the room, said Nancy Burgoyne, a psychologist and vice president of clinical services at the Family Institute at Northwestern University. If the matter goes unaddressed, the stories your children tell themselves about their worth in your eyes can be devastating.

Choose your words wisely. Burgoyne gave the example of a father of two boys who addressed the situation in a way that was palatable for his young son.

“He started by validating the child’s feelings: ‘I hear you; you feel angry because you think I like your brother more than I like you. Is that right?’” she recalled. “Then he said, ‘Right now, your brother and I are getting along better than you and I are getting along, that’s true. I am sorry if that hurts your feelings. I love you very much and always will.’”

To get your unfavored child back in good standing, try to acknowledge good behavior on their part in front of the entire family.

“One way to combat your natural favoritism, in addition to being fair in rules and rewards, is to focus on offering positive praise for behaviors you would like to see more,” Deverich said. “That positive feedback not only bolsters the self-worth of the unfavored child, but it reminds the parent of the good the child has.”

If you still feel guilty, know that even therapists admit they sometimes feel like choosing favorites, even if they don’t let themselves do it. “I walk my talk here,” Deverich said. “No favorites. It’s all about squelching your natural impulses.”