Supporting Siblings

Having a child diagnosed with a developmental disability poses unique challenges for all family members, including siblings. Brothers and sisters to special needs individuals may face challenges that are different than that of their peers. The particular experiences that siblings face at home, at school, and in the community can lead to emotional or behavioral health challenges.

Siblings that have differently-abled brothers or sisters may have extra responsibilities or expectations in the home, feel that they receive less attention from parents, and are likely to be less engaged in community and social activities. Children with special needs siblings may also harbor feelings of resentment, fear, anger, or embarrassment. These siblings may not make their difficulties or challenges known, in an attempt to not burden the family. This may lead to stress, anxiety, or depression in some siblings.

Answering Questions About Special Needs Siblings

- Be open and honest.
- Use age-appropriate language.
- Acknowledge and validate their feelings.
- Talk about the positives and strengths.
- Point out similarities, not just differences.
- Create regular opportunities to talk, answer questions, and share thoughts, feelings and emotions.

Supporting Children with Special Needs Siblings

- Provide meaningful, uninterrupted, one-on-one parent/child time.
- Maintain equal expectations for all children. Equal expectations does not mean the same expectations—all children have chores although chores may vary.
- Minimize the care-taking responsibilities of neuro-typical siblings.
- Ensure opportunities for social and peer engagement both with and without sibling engagement.
- Make time for sibling bonding activities.
- Allow siblings to problem solve disagreements with one-another
- Consider using formal supports or therapeutic services

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**Upcoming Events**

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