

# Strong Sibling Relationships

## for children with special needs

Relationships with brothers and sisters can lay a foundation in children with disabilities for future peer interactions. Taking steps to **foster a healthy relationship between siblings with and without disabilities** helps to develop a strong bond of love and loyalty. Not only will this affect the relationship that your child has with his or her sibling, it can also greatly affect how he or she interacts with others in society, especially those with different skills or abilities.

### 16 strategies to use with siblings of children with disabilities (Powell & Ogle, 1985)

- Be open and honest
- Limit the caregiving responsibilities of siblings
- Utilize supportive services
- Accept the disability; move forward
- Schedule special time to be with siblings without disabilities
- Let siblings settle their own differences when possible
- Welcome other children and friends into the home
- Praise all siblings
- Genuinely listen to siblings
- Involve all siblings in family events and decisions
- Recognize each child's unique qualities and family contribution
- Recognize special stress times for siblings and plan to minimize negative effects
- Use professionals when indicated to help siblings
- Teach siblings to interact
- Provide opportunities for a normal family life and normal family activities
- Join sibling-related organizations

### THE SIBLING EXPERIENCE:

#### Siblings of children with disabilities may struggle with strong feelings of:

- shame
- guilt
- jealousy
- pressure to succeed
- unimportance

#### They also have increases in positive traits, including:

- higher levels of selflessness and empathy
- higher levels of tolerance for differences
- increased sense of maturity and responsibility
- pride in sibling's accomplishments
- increased compassion, willingness to help
- strong sense of loyalty

#### Watch for potential warning signs\* in siblings without disabilities, such as:

- changes in eating or sleeping (too much or too little)
- physical symptoms like headaches or stomachaches
- perfectionism
- poor concentration
- poor self-esteem
- talk of hurting themselves
- difficulty separating from parents
- loss of interest in activities
- frequent crying or worrying
- withdrawal

\*Source: med.umich.edu

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