
Siblings of Children with Disabilities



The relationships between brothers and sisters are the most enduring of all familial bonds, outlasting marriages and parent-child relationships. Families with disabled children have unique dynamics and challenges. Although disability may bring greater levels of stress to a family, the outcome is not necessarily negative. People who grow up with disabled siblings tend to have a greater tolerance for differences and other positive attributes, such as insight and altruism. Here are just a few of the possible positive aspects for families wherein disability resides:

- Siblings support each other, especially away from home, regardless of disability.
- Sibling rivalry is less damaging and more empowering because it's based on a solid foundation of love.
- Fair treatment is more important than equal treatment.
- Parents maintain a healthy balance in nurturing themselves and all their children.
- Parents balance activities to ensure everyone in the family can participate.
- Family life is not dominated by the needs of one family member; disability does not identify the family.
- The family is proactive in anticipating and fulfilling its needs.
- Family members consider family life a top priority.
- Differences are accepted and valued; strengths are nurtured; and weaknesses are supported.
- Children with and without disabilities can model social and academic skills to their brothers and sisters.
- Communication among family members is open; feelings are expressed and acknowledged.
- The family has a common set of values and faith traditions that underlies all aspects of family life.

Resources:

The Other Child with Special Needs: Understanding Siblings of Disabled Children, By Kara Sheridan, www.disaboom.com

Siblings of Children with Disabilities, By Ann Logsdon, www.learningdisabilities.about.com

Sibling Support Project, www.siblingsupport.org

Created by Marsha Rivas, Diocese of Toledo Equal Access Ministry and used with permission 2010

