

Sibling Support Conversation Starters

A gentle family resource to foster connection, understanding and belonging

When one child needs extra support, siblings can feel confused, left out, worried, protective or unsure what to say. This resource gives families gentle conversation starters to help children share feelings, understand each other and build stronger connection.

Who this is for

Parents, carers and families supporting neurodivergent children, children with SEND, or children with SEMH needs.

How to use this resource

- Choose one or two questions at a time.
- Let children answer by talking, drawing, pointing, writing or choosing from simple options.
- Use calm moments first, rather than during conflict or overwhelm.
- Revisit questions over time. Feelings can change as children grow.

A gentle reminder

Siblings do not need to be perfect, patient or understanding all the time. They are children too. This guide is about helping everyone feel seen, heard and supported.

Starting the Conversation

Simple ways to open up family connection

Before you begin

Some children find direct questions difficult. You can make the conversation easier by using a relaxed activity, such as colouring, walking, playing with blocks, having a snack, or sitting side by side rather than face to face.

Try this

“I wondered if we could have a little chat about how things feel at home. There are no wrong answers.”

Give choices

“Would you like to talk, draw, write, or choose from some feeling words?”

Make it safe

“You are not in trouble. I just want to understand how things feel for you.”

Keep it short

Five minutes can be enough. You can always come back to it another day.

Warm-up questions

- What is something you enjoy doing as a family?
- What is one thing at home that feels calm or happy?
- What is one thing you wish adults understood better?
- What helps you feel noticed and included?
- What is one thing you like about your sibling?
- What is one thing that sometimes feels tricky between you and your sibling?

For younger children

Use simple choices such as happy, sad, cross, worried, left out, proud, tired, confused or excited. Children can point to a word, colour or picture instead of explaining.

Conversation Starters for Siblings

Helping siblings feel heard

Feelings and fairness

Conversation starter	Notes, ideas or drawings
Sometimes I feel happy when...	
Sometimes I feel left out when...	
I feel worried when...	
I wish adults knew...	
One thing that helps me feel special is...	
When my sibling is upset, I sometimes feel...	

Useful phrase for adults

“Thank you for telling me. I am listening. You are allowed to feel that way, and we can think together about what might help.”

Understanding Needs Without Blame

Helping children make sense of differences

Children may notice that rules, routines or adult responses are different for each sibling. This can feel unfair if it is not gently explained. These prompts help children understand that different support does not mean different love.

Fair does not always mean the same

Different people need different support to feel safe, calm and able to cope.

All feelings are valid

A sibling can love their brother or sister and still feel annoyed, tired or upset.

No one is to blame

Big feelings, sensory overwhelm or anxiety are not bad behaviour. They are signs that support may be needed.

Everyone matters

The child who needs extra support matters, and their siblings matter too.

Understanding each other

Conversation starter	Notes, ideas or drawings
What do you think your sibling finds hard?	
What do you think helps your sibling feel calm?	
What do you find hard when your sibling is upset?	
What helps you when things feel too noisy, busy or unfair?	
What could adults explain better?	
What would help our family work as a team?	

Building Connection

Small ways siblings can enjoy each other

Connection does not need to be big or complicated. Short, predictable and low-pressure activities can help siblings enjoy time together without it becoming overwhelming.

Connection ideas

- A 10-minute shared activity with a clear start and finish.
- Parallel play, such as drawing side by side or building separately with the same bricks.
- A “kindness swap”, where each child says or draws one kind thing about the other.
- Choosing a family song, film, snack, walk or game together.
- A calm shared routine, such as bedtime story, pet care, watering plants or baking.
- A special sibling box with games or activities that are only used for short connection time.

Connection prompts

Conversation starter	Notes, ideas or drawings
One thing we both enjoy is...	
A calm activity we could do together is...	
Something kind my sibling has done is...	
Something I could do to show kindness is...	
When we need a break from each other, we can...	
A family activity I would like to try is...	

When Things Feel Hard

Gentle repair after conflict or overwhelm

Families do not need to avoid every difficult moment. What matters is how adults help children repair afterwards. Repair teaches children that relationships can recover, feelings can be named, and everyone can be supported.

Pause first Have the conversation when everyone is calm. The middle of a meltdown or argument is not the teaching moment.	Name feelings Use simple words: “That felt loud”, “You looked worried”, “You needed space”.
Avoid blame Focus on needs and next steps rather than who was wrong.	Plan together Ask: “What could we try next time?”

Repair conversation starters

Conversation starter	Notes, ideas or drawings
When things got difficult, I felt...	
What I needed was...	
Next time, it might help if...	
A signal I could use when I need space is...	
One kind thing we can do after a hard moment is...	
Something I want to say is...	

Important

Children should not be made responsible for managing another child’s distress. Adults hold the responsibility for safety, boundaries and support.

Family Agreement Template

A simple plan everyone can understand

Use this page to create a shared family plan. Keep it simple and display it somewhere visible if helpful.

Family prompt	Our ideas
In our family, we all need...	
When someone feels overwhelmed, we can...	
When someone needs space, they can use this signal...	
Adults will help by...	
Siblings can help by...	
A calm activity we can do together is...	
One thing each child needs to feel special is...	
We will review this plan on...	

Printable Conversation Cards

Cut out, choose one, and talk together

What helps you feel calm at home?	What is one thing you wish adults noticed?
What makes you feel included?	What is something kind we can do for each other?
What does “fair” mean in our family?	What helps when things feel too loud or busy?
What is one thing you like about your sibling?	What is one activity we could enjoy together?
What helps after a difficult moment?	What would you like more of this week?
What would you like less of this week?	What makes you feel loved?