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New Nonprofit Tells Siblings of Kids with Disabilities: You're Not Alone

Adult sister to brother with autism launches book, podcast, and more to support kids with similar family experiences

CHICAGO—Chicago native Jessica Leving remembers clearly the night her brother, Billy, was diagnosed with autism. She was eight years old, and recalls coming home from dance class to find her mom crying in her room with the door closed. It was days before anyone would tell her why.

"Everything was different after Billy's diagnosis," says Leving. "Our lives started revolving around his doctor appointments and therapy sessions. It was all very hard for me to understand at that age."

Now an adult, Leving recently launched The Center for Siblings of People with Disabilities, a new nonprofit organization dedicated to helping brothers and sisters of people with additional needs feel seen, supported, and empowered. Though the Center offers resources for siblings of all ages, the organization has a special focus on providing early intervention for young siblings.

"There's no question that siblings of people with disabilities face unique challenges and have complex needs," the [new organization's web site](#) states. "In fact, **siblings of people with intellectual disabilities suffer from significantly higher rates of anxiety, depression, and eating disorders** than the general population when not provided with the right resources and support."

To that end, in just a few months of operations, The Center for Siblings of People with Disabilities has already released a [children's book](#) to directly support young siblings, as well as a [podcast for parents, direct service providers like therapists and teachers, and adult siblings](#). In addition, the organization leads workshops for siblings and parents, and speaks about sibling needs to community groups.

The book, [Billy's Sister: Life when your sibling has a disability](#), is written by Leving and based on her experiences growing up with her brother, Billy. The colorful, simply illustrated book gently helps children grapple with the full range of emotions that can come with their unique family situations—including sadness, frustration, and of course, joy. It can be purchased in print or digital format on [Amazon](#).

"It's normal for kids to feel confused and frustrated when a sibling has challenges that are hard to understand," says Leving. "Beyond the logistical and scheduling changes that often take over the household, there are also a whirlwind of emotions. My hope is that this book will help young siblings see themselves and their feelings represented in a simple, easy to understand story."

After premiering the book last August and discovering the tremendous lack of resources in this arena, Leving, who started her career as a journalist, put her journalism skills to work to also create a companion podcast that would offer parents, educators and healthcare providers a roadmap to how to best support the special siblings in their lives. The [Special Siblings Podcast](#), which showcases interviews with psychologists, researchers, program providers, and a diverse sampling of parents and siblings themselves, is now available on iTunes, Spotify, and SoundCloud.

To learn more about The Center for Siblings of People with Disabilities, or to bring their programs to your school, camp or community group, visit www.siblingcenter.org or call 657-229-2182.

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Featured reviews for *Billy's Sister: Life when your sibling has a disability*:

"What I especially like is that though this is written by the sibling of a person with a disability, it demonstrates that the sibling relationship isn't much changed by the fact that one of the individuals has a disability. All of the same emotions and experiences that occur between typical siblings also occurs between those who have some differences." -- Ellen Garber Bronfeld, disability advocate and autism mom

"The loving and honest portrayal of Jessica and Billy's life together will let other children know they are not alone. While there may be frustrations, there is also lots of love." – Suzanne Aaron, Amazon reviewer

"I enjoyed reading the book and realizing I'm not alone. Thank you for writing this book." – Carmi, Amazon reviewer

Featured reviews for *The Special Siblings Podcast*:

"This podcast is amazing and so eye-opening. As an adult sibling, I found myself sobbing in the car while listening because I couldn't believe that other people actually felt the way I have felt. It was so nice to feel validated. Cannot recommend this podcast enough." – Angela Mariez, iTunes reviewer

"Informative and inspiring podcast on a critical, needed topic." – Teri Steinberg, iTunes reviewer, disability advocate and autism mom

"This is such a helpful topic for so many people and a population that might be overlooked. Although I don't have a special sibling, I work a lot with kids/adults who do have special siblings and this is a great recourse to pass on to them!" – Stephanie Adams, LCPC, iTunes reviewer