

12 Ways to Support Siblings of Children with Disabilities

1. **Expect and allow for typical sibling conflict.**
 - a. Siblings should not have to put feelings aside.
 - b. Siblings deserve time to be angry, misbehave, and have conflicts like other kids.
2. **Create a safe environment.**
 - a. All children should feel safe at home.
 - b. Siblings' safety should always be as important as supporting and educating the brother or sister with a disability.
3. **Give siblings opportunities to connect with peers.**
 - a. Connect siblings with a support group – other people who have “been there” and “are there.”
 - b. If sibling support isn't in your area, fill the needed gap and start one (<https://siblingsupport.org/sibshops> has great resources).
4. **Provide access to accurate, age-appropriate information.**
 - a. Be proactive – seek out trusted sources and provide the sibling with knowledge.
 - b. Talk about the disability, health implications, terminology, social, and behavioral considerations. Allow questions respectfully without criticism, shame, or judgment.
5. **Carve out one-on-one time with the sibling.**
 - a. Siblings need to know that they are considered and cared for as individuals.
 - b. Let siblings know they are essential and that you care about their interests, dreams, and day-to-day and future events.
6. **Celebrate all children's achievements and milestones.**
 - a. Celebrate both equally.
 - b. Connect with respite resources and brainstorm creative solutions to ensure all family members' milestones are celebrated.
7. **Actively involve siblings in the educational and support team**
 - a. Siblings are invaluable sources of information.
 - b. Invite, but don't require siblings to attend meetings, discuss the future, and care.
8. **Advocate for services to support siblings.**
 - a. Advocate for programs focused on assisting siblings.
 - b. “Anyone interested in the welfare of people with disabilities ought to be interested in us.” – sibling.



9. Learn more about life as a sibling of a child with a disability.

walkinmyshoesprogram.org

- a. Listen to “experts” about siblings’ emotions, concerns, behaviors, and experiences.
- b. Listening will help you understand the siblings’ perspectives and offer practical support.

10. Address siblings’ concerns about the future

- a. Parents can help by:
 - i. Making solid plans for the future of their children with disabilities
 - ii. Listen attentively to sibling’s input and suggestions.
 - iii. Develop a backup plan in case Plan A doesn’t work.
 - iv. Accept that siblings’ availability may change and plan accordingly.
 - v. Send siblings a clear message that they have their parents' blessing to pursue their dreams and life.
- b. Have age-appropriate frank discussions and aim for joint responsibilities among siblings.

11. Acknowledge siblings’ complex emotions.

- a. Let siblings know that their feelings, even the negative ones, are normal and ok to talk to you about.
- b. Acknowledge their concerns and offer reassurance when possible.

12. Set and support high expectations. “Fair is not equal”

- a. Set appropriate high expectations for all children.
- b. Foster independence for all children and presume the competence of all kids while embedding life skills instructions at natural times.



*Information gathered from various resources and evidence-based research



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