

THINGS SIBLINGS WANT PARENTS TO KNOW

- 1. The Right to One's Own Life.** Throughout their lives, brothers and sisters may play many different roles in the lives of their siblings who have special needs. Don't make assumptions about responsibilities typically-developing siblings may take on without a frank and open discussion. Self-determination, after all, is for everyone -- including brothers and sisters.
- 2. Acknowledging Siblings' Concerns.** Like parents, brothers and sisters will experience a wide array of often ambivalent emotions regarding the impact of their siblings' special needs. Because most siblings will have the longest-lasting relationship with the family member who has a disability, these concerns will change over time. Learn more about siblings' life-long and ever changing concerns.
- 3. Siblings need realistic expectations.** Families need to set high expectations for all their children. However, some typically-developing brothers and sisters react to their siblings' disability by setting unrealistically high expectations for themselves -- and some feel they must somehow compensate for their siblings' special needs. Parents can help their typically-developing children by conveying clear expectations and unconditional support.
- 4. Expect Typical Behavior From Typically-Developing Siblings.** Although difficult for parents to watch, teasing, name-calling, arguing and other forms of conflict are common among most brothers and sisters -- even when one has special needs. While parents may be appalled at siblings' harshness toward one another, much of this conflict can be a beneficial part of normal social development. Typically-developing siblings deserve a life where they, like other children, sometimes misbehave, get angry, and fight with their siblings.

- 5. Keep us safe.** Some siblings live with brothers and sisters who have challenging behaviors. Other siblings assume responsibilities for themselves and their siblings that go beyond their age level and place all parties in vulnerable situations. Siblings deserve to have their own personal safety given as much importance as the family member who has special needs.



- 6. Opportunities to Meet Peers.**

For most parents, the thought of "going it alone," raising a child with special needs without knowing another parent in a similar situation would be unthinkable. Its no different for brothers and sisters. Sibshop offer siblings the common-sense support and validation and the knowledge that they are not alone.

- 7. Siblings need Information.** Throughout their lives, brothers and sisters have an ever-changing need for information about their sibling's disability, and its treatment and implications.

- 8. Sibs' Concerns about the Future.**

Early in life, many brothers and sisters worry about what obligations they will have toward their sibling in the days to come. Parents can reassure their typically-developing children by making plans for the future of their children with special needs, involve and listen to their typically-developing children as they make these plans, consider backup plans, and know that siblings' attitude toward the extent of their involvement as adults may change over time. Siblings value having a say in whether and how they will be involved in the lives of their siblings who have disabilities as adults, and the level, type, and duration of involvement.



- 9. One-on-One time with Parents.** Children need to know from their parents' deeds and words that their parents care about them as individuals. When parents carve time out of a busy schedule to grab a bite at a local burger joint or window shop at the mall with their typically-developing children, it conveys a message that parents "are there" for them as well and provides an excellent opportunity to talk about a wide range of topics.

- 10. Celebrate Every Child's Achievements and Milestones.** Over the years, we've met siblings whose parents did not attend their high school graduation -- even when their children were valedictorians -- because the parents were unable to leave their child with special needs. One child's special needs should not overshadow another's achievements and milestones. Families who seek respite resources, strive for flexibility, and seek creative solutions can help assure that the accomplishments of all family members are celebrated.

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About the Sibling Support Project and WisconSibs

The **Sibling Support Project**, believing that disabilities, illness, and mental health issues affect the lives of *all* family members. **WisconSibs**, established in 1998, is a non-profit organization dedicated to the interests of siblings throughout their lifelong journey.

For more tips for parents and information about Sibshops, sibling issues, and other resources for children, teens and adults who have siblings with special needs, contact:

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