

THINGS SIBLINGS WANT PROFESSIONALS 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. **Learn More About Life as a Sibling.** Anyone interested in families ought to be interested in siblings and their concerns. Providers can learn more about "life as a sib" by facilitating a Sibshop, hosting a sibling panel, or reading books by and about brothers and sisters. WisconSibs, Inc offers presentations for staff, conference or other professional or family meetings. Visit the websites at the end of this flyer to learn more about Sibshop facilitator training.
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.** Just like parents, siblings benefit from knowing they aren't alone. Sibshops offer siblings the common-sense support and validation and the knowledge that they are not alone. Check the Sibshops available in WI by visiting www.siblingsupport.org



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. **Include Brothers and Sisters on Advisory Boards and in Policies Regarding Families.**

Reserving board seats for siblings will give the board a unique, important perspective and reflect the agency's concern for the well-being of brothers and sisters.

Developing policies based on the important roles played by brothers and sisters will help assure that their concerns and contributions are a part of the agency's commitment to families.



9. **Include Siblings in the Definition of "Family."** Many educational, health care, and social service agencies profess a desire to offer family-centered services but continue to overlook the family members who will have the longest-lasting relationship with the person who has the special needs—the sisters and brothers. Are your services truly "family-centered", or still "parent-centered"?

10. **Actively Reach Out to Brothers and Sisters.** Agency personnel should consider inviting (but not requiring) brothers and sisters to attend informational, IEP, IFSP, and transition planning meetings, and clinic visits. Siblings frequently have legitimate questions that can be answered by service providers. Brothers and sisters also have informed opinions and perspectives and can make positive contributions to the child's team.

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About the Sibling Support Project and WisconSibs

The **Sibling Support Project** believes that disabilities, illness, and mental health issues affect the lives of *all* family members. **WisconSibs** (formerly Fox Valley Sibling Support Network), established in 1998, is dedicated to the interests of siblings in Wisconsin.

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: