



Tips for Siblings of Children with Diverse Intellectual, Emotional, and Physical Needs

As they grow, kids who have a sibling with a disability may experience complex and complicated emotions. However, many families find children experience unique benefits from having a sibling with diverse intellectual, emotional, and physical needs. They are more understanding of differences, more tolerant, self-confident, and have an increased sense of family loyalty. Here are some tips to help parents foster and strengthen the relationship between a child who is typically developing and a child with disabilities.



- 1 Your child may have questions or concerns about their sibling's disability. Answer their questions, and share information that helps alleviate any concerns.

 - Explain your child's disability in simple terms, and let them know what they can expect.
 - Tell them about all the things their sibling is good at, as well as things they might need more help with.
 - Help them understand positive ways to interact with their sibling.
- 2 Encourage your child to express their emotions and concerns. A child can experience confusing feelings of guilt, jealousy, or anger. If your child expresses these emotions, they're less likely to act out through negative behaviors.
- 3 Treat your child who is typically developing in an age-appropriate manner, not as an adult or caretaker. Don't expect the child to assume responsibilities for which they're unprepared.
- 4 But do involve children in the care of their sibling. You can include them in planning discussions and allow them to help make decisions about issues that directly affect them and the family.
- 5 Plan one-on-one time with your typically developing child, and make that time predictable. For example, you could spend 30 minutes after dinner or 10 minutes each day at bedtime with them. This helps support both the child-parent relationship and can reduce resentment that can develop within the sibling relationship.
- 6 Resist the tendency to label children. Avoid saying things like this child "never gives us any trouble," or that child "needs our help." Once labeled, a child strives to emulate that role and suppresses contradictory feelings or behaviors.
- 7 Avoid making comparisons between the siblings — even if the comparisons are positive, it can make children feel less unique.
- 8 Take advantage of support networks such as sibling support groups, school counselors, and physicians. Your typically developing child might also benefit from individual therapy. A therapist, support group, or counselor offers a safe environment to ask difficult questions, express confusing feelings, share experiences, and explore their own needs.