



Brothers and Sisters of a Child with Autism

- It is important to be aware of the different feelings that siblings of a child with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) may be experiencing. These feelings can change throughout the sibling's life. Although family life and schedules can be time consuming, siblings of a child with ASD need to have time to express their emotions and needs. You may have to initiate these conversations to show that it is all right to discuss and that you are interested in their needs and perspectives.
- Spend a consistent amount of time with the child's siblings to talk and share. Short trips to the grocery store, a ride to a friend's house, and time before bed can be time shared just with them. It is important to recognize their needs as well as to celebrate the successes and good things happening in their lives.
- Provide the siblings with age-appropriate and reliable information about ASD. Without knowledge, brothers and sisters may assume incorrect information. They will be able to better understand their sibling's actions and needs if their understanding is accurate. Ask what they know about ASD in order to correct possible inaccuracies.
- Let the child's siblings know that it's alright to express their emotions honestly, without criticism. Brothers and sisters of children with ASD need to be able to share the way they feel. Honestly share your emotions with the siblings so that they can identify with them and be more open to share theirs, as well.
- Although they will develop a relationship all their own, brothers and sisters may need help figuring out ways to communicate and to play. Help the siblings learn how to interact with their brother or sister. Provide opportunities and choices for sharing without forcing the brother or sister to engage in ways he or she may be uncomfortable. Help them understand that they can interact with each other even if they are different. Find ways to protect the belongings of the siblings. This may involve placing them in secure locations or teaching the children how to prevent and respond to these situations.
- Be careful not to place too many expectations and responsibilities on the child's siblings. The brother or sister may feel increased responsibility caring for the sibling with ASD. Caregivers can contact their local school district, college, community organizations, neighbors, religious communities, family members, case manager, and their physician to find people who could provide respite care. Governmental agencies may also be able to provide respite workers or financial support for the respite needs of families.
- Find ways for the siblings to engage in age-appropriate recreation and leisure activities with friends and family. Develop ways for the siblings to feel comfortable bringing friends to the home. Everyone needs to have some time to have some fun and respite from the challenges that many families experience with a child with ASD.

- It may seem to siblings that they have more responsibilities than their brother or sister with ASD. Involve the child with ASD with household tasks that he or she is capable of accomplishing. Social stories, activity schedules, and charts can be used as tools for these activities. A template for a social story as well as other resources are available at www.childrens-specialized.org/KohlsAutismAwareness. Help the siblings understand that responsibilities may seem unequal, but that they are fair.
- Find ways for the siblings to connect with others their age who have brothers or sisters with ASD. This helps them to feel linked with others who understand.
- Help the child's siblings learn methods to handle comments about their brother or sister. The siblings may help with words to use as a response to questions or remarks from others. Work together so that they are comfortable with what they say.
- When a sibling expresses or shows anger or is upset by the brother or sister with ASD, provide ways for the child to express these emotions in a healthy and safe manner. Support groups, counseling, art, music, and sports are some ways to express these emotions.
- Siblings of children diagnosed with ASD may be at higher risk of developmental problems. Talk to your healthcare professional about developmental screening for the siblings.

Helpful Resources

- **Friends Like You. Friends Like Me.**
www.childrens-specialized.org/KohlsAutismAwareness
- **A Siblings Guide to Autism – Autism Speaks Family Support Tool Kit**
http://secure.autismspeaks.org/site/c.8hKPL7NMLpJ4G/b.7809685/k.3B7C/Siblings_Support_Tool_Kit_Download_Request/apps/ka/ct/contactus.asp?c=8hKPL7NMLpJ4G&b=7809685&en=8hIFKRMvG7IOK1MyH6LKI3OPLiIJSNwGeLXJaOPIrK5G
- **Siblings of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders**
<http://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/developmental-disabilities/pages/Siblings-of-Children-with-Autism-Spectrum-Disorders.aspx>

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