

A person's autism can also impact other family members. This information sheet is designed to explain how autism may affect siblings and give some tips on how to support siblings.

Although for the most part sibling relationships with their autistic brother or sister will be positive, there will be times when they struggle. Sometimes, they may have negative, angry feelings against the brother or sister because they feel like they spoil games, destroy possessions, are noisy, and cause the family embarrassment out and about.

These emotions can make the sibling feel guilty. This can result in frustration, possible aggression or withdrawal, sadness and regret. They may not want to bring friends home, have their brother or sister attend the same school as them, or admit to their peer group that their family is different.

A lot of time and energy may be devoted to the autistic child, and a sibling may feel that they are not given enough priority. They may also feel that they are supposed to be understanding and supportive because their brother or sister is autistic.

Siblings of autistic children often find themselves helping parents and may find themselves in the role of a young carer. Although they may not express their concerns, for fear of causing anxiety for their parents, they often worry about the future. Their concerns might be about the likelihood of having an autistic child themselves, or about what will happen when their parents die.

The experience of having an autistic brother or sister will be affected by:

- The nature and severity of the person's autism
- The position in the family of each sibling
- The amount of information about autism and their sibling's diagnosis that they have been given
- How other family members respond to the autistic person

Supporting siblings of people with autism

- Provide opportunities for siblings to meet other brothers/sisters of individuals with autism, and share their experiences and emotions.
- Keep them informed and involved in decisions about their sibling.
- Give them some 'special time' with parents, away from the other siblings including the one/s with autism.
- Help them feel valued for their own sake.
- Help them understand it is ok to express dissatisfaction with the autistic sibling.
- Give them time and opportunity to live their own life, without guilt.

- Read books with them to help them understand they are not alone with these feelings and to acknowledge the uniqueness of the sibling experience and their ongoing role in the life of their autistic brother or sister
- Plan for the future, so the burden of responsibility is reduced
- Build a circle of support and seek out available services to support the whole family and the individuals within the family, for example a young carers' group or short term respite.

Useful resources

Siblings: The Autism Spectrum Through our Eyes

by Jane Johnson and Anne Van Rensselaer (2010)

Can I tell you about Autism ?

A guide for friends, family members and professionals

by Jude Welton (2014) (for readers 7 years plus)

Autism: I See Things Differently

by Pat Thomas (2015) (for young children)

Autism and my family: sibling's workbook

by Autism West Midlands