



for siblings of children and adults with disability/illness

Siblings Australia

September 2023



Siblings Australia

- 24-year history
- Only sibling-specific organisation in Australia
- History of Siblings Australia
- Funded primarily through an Information, Linkages and Capacity Building grant



Why focus on siblings?

- Family focus
- Holistic, wrap-around – helps with family capacity building
- Focuses on “the ordinary”
- Siblings needs unique and need attention

Benefits and challenges of being a sibling



Benefits for sibs

- Understanding of differences, diversity
- Compassion, empathy
- Unconditional love
- Maturity
- Skills to take into a career



Challenges for siblings

- Confusion – lack of information
- Identity issues – not as important, who am I?
- Isolation – family/peers
- Difficulty expressing BIG feelings – grief, guilt, anger, fear
- Shame, low self-esteem
- Extra responsibility/family stress
- Pressure to achieve, to not ‘make waves’
- Others’ reactions
- Concerns re future



Signs of stress

- Withdrawal
- 'Acting-up'
- 'good child', people pleaser
- Perfectionism, overachieving
- Anxiety, depression, low self-worth
- Stomach aches, sleep problems
- School, social difficulties



Sibling Voices

“I felt completely isolated. I thought I couldn’t share any of that part of my life with my friends. They didn’t understand and I felt alienated from them. Other kids never had the same responsibility.”

“Discussions amongst my non-disabled siblings led us to observing that at no stage in our lives has any professional, agency or service ever asked us if we were ok, how did we feel, did we need anything or offered us support.”



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Video content: if you have a sibling with a chronic mental or physical disability

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Creator: **themindspot** (Debbie, LMHC | Therapist · 3-4) [Follow](#)

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Location: Sky Aesthetic - Tollan Kim

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Sibling needs

- Open communication within family
Information, permission, feel special
- Strong connections with family/friends
Sense of value, positive meanings, assist with relationship with child with condition – difficult behaviours, having fun
- Outside sources of support eg school, community programs
Skills/coping strategies/ how ask help/manage others' reactions
- Connections with other siblings
- Help with independence/identity/future



What can parents do?



What can schools do?



Our Vision

Starts with:

Recognition of the challenges; individual attention; permission to share feelings; provision of information and resources

Leads to:

Connection with other siblings; pursuit of own life goals; friendship; linkage to community; strong family relationships

Ends with:

Capability to manage the challenges; better coping skills; knowing where to go for help; positive self-identity; good mental health

Acknowledged

Connected

Resilient



Services

SiBWISE

1

e-learning program parents & pros

Claimable on NDIS
'Parent/carer training'

Or PD points

Build capacity and
confidence



2

One on one parent sessions

Understand issues
and how support

How to strengthen
sibling relationship

More confidence

SiBWORKS

3

Peer support for 8-12-year-old sibs

Feel less isolated

Understand
disability

Learn skills to
manage



Future Plans



1

Early Childhood

Future plans
Alex and Arlo
Age-appropriate
recognitions



2

Online resources

Extension of
services
Delineate by age
Available to
anyone, anywhere



3

Professional learning

Co-designed across
education, allied
health, and
disability
More in-depth look
at support for
practitioners



Key Points

- Siblings are important, both in terms of their own wellbeing but also what they contribute to the child with disability
- Sibling relationship a key lifetime relationship, regardless of any caregiving role – well-being, social inclusion, safety
- Sibs can face complex challenges over a lifetime
- It is relatively easy to give them the support they need
- Sibling support leads to benefits for whole family





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