

Special Sibs

1. How do you explain disability to a child?
 - a. Understanding children's development of concepts (Piaget)
 - i. Pre-operational – until about the age of seven; ideas are formulated based on limited life experiences
 - ii. Concrete – 7-11 years of age; concepts grow out of direct experiences but are now aligned with logical thinking
 - iii. Formal Operational – age 12 or so; engage in abstract reasoning
2. Children's understanding or lack of understanding very much ties in with developmental stages and age
 - a. Very young children believe their brother's or sister's Autism is contagious or could happen to them
 - b. Young children knew the word "Autism" early on but did not understand what it meant
 - c. Children need an explanation at their level; as they grow, more information should be provided
 - d. Lifelong need for information
3. Questions
 - a. Allow all questions to be asked; encourage them
 - b. Provide child with neutral, non-judgmental responses
 - c. Allow for open conversation
 - d. Keep explanations simple
 - i. Ages 4-5 – ask questions
 - ii. Ages 7 and older – ask why or what caused it
4. Dealing with Emotions – Acknowledgment
 - a. Fear
 - b. Anger

- c. Jealousy
 - d. Embarrassment
 - e. Loss
 - f. Isolation
5. Ongoing Open Lines of Communication – Removal of Barriers
- a. Parents' emotions – what to share, what not to share
 - i. The right place
 - ii. Share feelings, but reassure love for child with disability
 - iii. Accepting of child's feelings
 - iv. Set up regular family meetings
6. Family Activities
- a. Entire family or not?
 - b. One-on-one time
 - c. Private space
7. Other Equipping Skills
- a. Teach play skills by modeling
 - b. Communication modes
 - c. Schedule play time with siblings
8. Things to watch
- a. Allow typical siblings to have a life outside of family
 - b. Watch childcare role – as family members, each has responsibilities; but siblings are not the main caregivers
 - c. Should not be put in situations where sibs discipline
 - d. Protection of space and belongings
9. Adult Siblings
- a. Long-term care questions and responsibilities
 - b. Legal and financial concerns
 - c. What is the plan once parents are gone?

10. Creation of Sibling Programs

- a. Recreational setting
- b. Discussion of joy and concerns
- c. Skills to handle commonly-shared experiences
- d. Information warehouse
- e. Networking opportunity

RESOURCES

Siblings of Children with Autism, Harris and Glasberg

Special Siblings, Mary McHugh

My Brother Kevin Has Autism, Richard Carlson

SpecialSibs.org

Siblingsupport.org