



The Challenges Faced by Siblings of Children with Autism

Being a sibling to a child with autism can be a unique and sometimes challenging experience. While these siblings may love their brothers or sisters very much, they can face several difficulties. Luckily, there are many resources to help them.

Social and Behavioral Problems: Siblings of children with autism might find themselves dealing with social and behavioral issues. They may struggle to connect with friends or handle their own feelings because of the extra stress they experience at home. One way to increase social skills is to provide your child with access to peers at their age with typical development. There are many organizations dedicated to offering sibling resources including peer groups which help manage stress.

Difficulty Bonding and Communicating: In some cases, it can be difficult to form a close bond with a sibling who has autism. Playing together or having meaningful conversations might be challenging, which can create distance in their relationship. Families can help by finding fun activities they both enjoy, like sensory play, music or games.

Handling Emotions: Siblings often go through many feelings, such as anxiety, anger, jealousy, sadness and loneliness. These emotions are completely normal, but they can feel overwhelming at times. Joining a sibling support group can provide a space to share their feelings and realize that others feel the same way.

Feeling Like a Caretaker: Sometimes, siblings might feel they need to take care of their brother or sister with autism. This extra responsibility can be stressful. It's important for families to make sure siblings have time for their own activities and friendships outside the home, giving them a break from caregiving.

Worrying about Parents: Siblings often see the stress their parents face, which can make them worry even more. Open communication is key to easing this stress. Sometimes, it can be helpful to talk to a family therapist. Your insurance company can help you find referrals to the best provider for you.

Impact on Activities: The costs of autism therapies and treatments can limit how much money families have for fun activities. This can be disappointing for siblings. Also, having a sibling with autism might make it hard for the family to go out or travel together. Helping siblings participate in activities and providing support for family outings can create a sense of normalcy. There are also travel organizations that create inclusive vacations for families, allowing for fun and stress-free trips.

Conclusion: Siblings of children with autism may face challenges, but support from family and friends can make things easier. Keeping a healthy relationship with siblings is important, and many resources are available to help families through these challenges.

Reviewed by Senior Director – Clinical Strategy, Research & Autism, LCSW, BCBA, CCM

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