

Parenting the Brothers and Sisters of a Child with a Medical Condition or Disability

As a parent of a child with special needs, you may find that you cannot do all that you want to do.

What is realistic for you in the time that you have?

You may not be able to have time alone with each of your children every day.

Instead, you can try to say or do something else to make each child feel special. For instance, your child can talk with you or help you when you are fixing dinner.

When you are away all day, you might call your other children. If you don't see a child for a day or more, you can tell him later about the ways that you were thinking of him while you were away.

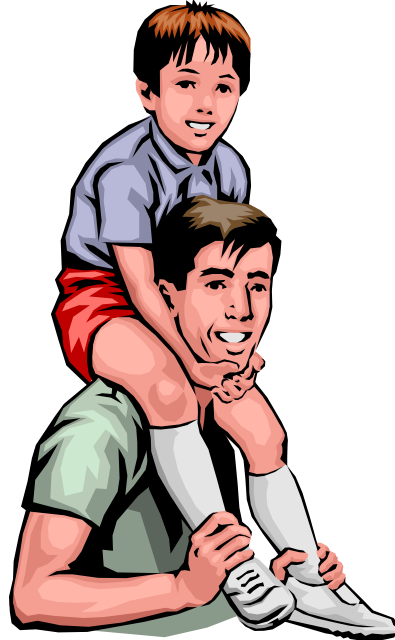
Try leaving something special, such as a note or snack, for your children at home when you must be away.

Be sure there is a picture at home and at the hospital, which includes all members of the family.

These pictures can help family members feel closer when they must be apart.

Taking care of yourself may be one of the best things you can do for your children.

If you are tired or not eating well, you are more likely to become ill or grouchy. Set aside a few minutes of quiet, private time each day for reading, exercising, or relaxing.



Be honest with your children about the needs of your child with a disability or delay.

What they imagine might be worse than the truth. Answer questions as well as you can. Don't be afraid to say that you don't know. As often as you can, take a child to the hospital to see his/her brother or sister.

Young children may think they can catch a disability.

If your special needs child is older, your younger children may believe that they will "get it" when they get older.

Explain the truth in a calm way, using words your children know, such as *some kids think they can catch cerebral palsy, but that's not true.*

Your children may be confused or anxious about their brother or sister with a disability.

They may be unsure about what they can or cannot do with her. If your children want to, you might include them in the care and treatment of your special needs child. This may help them to learn more and feel better about themselves.



Children who have a brother or sister with a disability are likely to have many troubling thoughts and feelings.

You can help them express themselves by sharing your thoughts and feelings. Listen when your children talk about their feelings. Some of your children's feelings or thoughts may surprise you.

They may feel afraid if they see their parents crying or upset. They might be worried about what their friends will say. They might be concerned about their own future. They might feel angry or jealous about the time, attention, and extra gifts given to their brother or sister with a disability.

Try to stick to your daily routine at home as much as you can.

This means keeping bed times and meals at about the same times every day. Also, try to use people that your children know well to care for them when you are not there.

For more information about sibling support, contact:

Sibling Information Network
249 Glenbrook Road
Suite U64
Storrs, CT 06269-2064

Tell each of your children how much you love them every day. Show it with hugs, words of praise, and saying, *I love you.*

Visit us on the web at <http://ag.udel.edu/extension/fam/>

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