

Brothers and Sisters of Deaf Children

Parents may sometimes worry about conflicts between their children and when one child has a hearing loss, conflicts can be more challenging to resolve. Communication breakdowns between brothers and sisters, or when communication is difficult it can lead to situations that can be frustrating for parents.

This information sheet aims to provide families with some hints and guidance on how to minimise problems that may occur between brothers and sisters from time to time.

Why do brothers and sisters argue?

Brothers and sisters argue because:

- They are simply siblings and sibling rivalry is not unusual, especially if they are close in age
- They may be testing the boundaries to see how far they can take a conflict before there are consequences
- They may enjoy arguing and think it is fun, especially if they get reactions from the adults around them
- They like to tease each other and in the security of the family they can argue without fear of losing face or friends
- They may be bored or tired – this is a significant reason for younger aged children
- They may be competing for parents' attention
- They may be unable to share and so they argue for things. Sharing is not easy for a lot of children
- They may be concerned about fairness

Is arguing between brothers and sisters always bad?

Constant arguments between siblings are often very stressful for parents. It adds extra pressure on top of the many stressors of life and can cause parents to feel like failures. Some parents worry about the lasting effects that arguing may have on their children and often perceive arguing to be a behaviour that must be stopped. Sometimes arguments worry the parents more than the children.

Arguing between brothers and sisters can also serve a purpose. It can teach children:

- How to negotiate
- How to share with others

For further information about Deaf Children Australia visit our website,
www.deafchildrenaustralia.org.au

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- How to deal with resentment
- How to successfully manage conflict and disagreement
- How to solve problems more effectively

Sometimes our other children seem to resent the time that we spend with our deaf child. What can we do to help them deal with their feelings?

Brothers and sisters of deaf children may experience all sorts of emotions toward their deaf brother or sister, both positive and negative. Some of the positive feelings may include care, concern, admiration and a wish to support or protect the deaf sibling. On the other hand these positive feelings may be mixed with such feelings as anxiety, worry, jealousy or resentment. If parents find that they need to spend lots of time with their deaf child, their siblings may feel a sense of rejection and isolation. These feelings can lead to some difficult behaviour such as aggressive behaviour towards the parents and/or towards the deaf brother or sister.

There are a number of ways families may help children overcome these issues. These include:

Explore each other's feelings:

It is not unnatural for children to resent the extra time their parents spend with other siblings. Encourage children to express their feelings about their deaf brother or sister and accept these feelings. Talking about these feelings will help to foster healthy relationships in the family and can assist in the development of healthy self esteem in a child.

Talk about deafness and what it means:

It is important to explain about deafness and its affects on the brothers and sisters of the deaf child. Talk about what the deaf child can and cannot hear and how hearing aids and/or cochlear implants may or may not assist. Brothers and sisters of the deaf child may gain a better understanding and accept their parents spending time with their deaf brother or sister.

Discuss how to solve problems with your children:

Open communication is very important in family relationships. Encourage children to express themselves within the family. Once children have expressed how they feel, talk about ways in which these feelings can be managed. Children will then feel the family is taking their opinions seriously and will feel involved. Encourage children's ideas about fixing problems and try them out.

Sharing the time available:

Parents give their time and attention to their children based on the individual needs of each child at any given time. Having a deaf child means that at times they may require more attention than their siblings. When this occurs parents

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will need to explain to the child's siblings that they need to spend a bit more time with their deaf child to help them and that the other children in the family do not have this need. Parents may need to spend more time with their deaf child to:

- Promote language development
- Visit the speech pathologist and follow up with lessons
- Visit audiologists and other professionals
- Help with reading and writing skills, particularly explaining English words and grammar
- Meet other deaf children

Children often feel that if more time is spent with their brothers and sisters it means that parents love them less than their sibling. It is important to help them ask about their feelings and assure them this is not the case.

Family Networks

Extended family networks can be an excellent way of supporting all children in the family. Other people in the family may be able to give the children who are not deaf the attention they need.

Communication between our deaf child and our hearing child seems to be a problem. What can I do?

If children need to make a special effort to communicate, or find communication hard, difficulties can occur. If this happens constantly, children will become frustrated and may stop trying to communicate with each other.

It is very important that all children in the family know they have an equal responsibility to assist with communication. It is not only the deaf child's responsibility to communicate; brothers and sisters can develop the skills to meet their deaf sibling half way.

Here are some things you can try:

- Show by example what will assist the deaf child in communicating with others
- Teach your children to look at their deaf brother or sister and speak clearly
- Explain to them the problems of background noise and distance when their deaf brother or sister is wearing their hearing aids and/or cochlear implants
- Expect brothers and sisters to learn to sign if your deaf child uses signs. If you can, teach signing in the home or more formally if you have the opportunity
- Explain to your children that sometimes they will need to assist their friends in knowing how to communicate with their deaf brother and sister
- Praise them for good communication and for making the effort

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How can I find out how other people have solved the problems that I encounter with my deaf child and his brothers and sisters?

Other families of deaf children may be able to assist with advice and information on how to deal with issues within the family. Family camps and other activities for deaf children, organised by a number of organisations, are a good way for brothers and sisters of deaf children to meet other children in the same situation. For more information on locations of such camps, contact the Helpline at Deaf Children Australia.

Parent Support Groups are groups which have been established by parents who have children who are deaf. They can provide a wide range of support through resources, information and understanding. The following websites may assist you in finding a group in your area.

Deaf Children Australia

www.deafchildrenaustralia.org.au

This link can provide you with information and contact details of the Parent Support Groups throughout Australia.

Aussie Deaf Kids

www.aussiedeafkids.com

Aussie Deaf Kids is an online Parent Support Group and comes highly recommended from parents throughout Australia.

Resources

If you don't have access to the Internet, contact the Deaf Children Australia Help Line for a printed copy of this web site information.

Resources for brothers and sisters

www.acd.org.au/siblings/index.htm

Association of Children with a Disability

The Association for Children with a Disability's siblings page provides plenty of resources and tips for brothers and sisters of children with a disability.

www.yourshout.org.au

Your Shout

Your Shout is a webpage designed by and for brothers and sisters of children who have a disability. You can write and post poetry or, find resources and information

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Deaf Children Australia

Deaf Children Australia has a recreation program that welcomes brothers and sisters of deaf children. A variety of interesting and exciting agendas have been designed for deaf children and their families to get together and have fun. Contact the Help Line at Deaf Children Australia if you are interested in having such a program implemented in your area.

www.siblingsaustralia.org.au

Siblings Australia Inc

This website provides resources to organisations across Australia. There is a space where siblings can write and share their experiences online.

www.noahsarkvic.org.au

Noah's Ark

Noah's Ark offers a variety of services to families, including a camp for brothers and sisters of children with a disability

Other Resources

www.latrobe.edu.au/bouverie/kidsonly/ttc/index.html

Temper Tamers Club

This website is a site where children and young people can visit to help them cope if they lose control of their tempers. It may also give parents an insight into the emotions of their child and provide them with tips, relevant to a variety of age levels, to help overcome the issues.

www.aceinfo.net.au

Deafness Resources

The deafness resource guide provides a wide range of products about deafness.

In the children's section of Deafness Resources, a book, *A Very Special Sister*, deals with the mixed feelings of a deaf girl upon the arrival of her new baby sister who is hearing.

Another book, *I Have a Sister, My Sister is Deaf*, describes what it is like to have a deaf sister through an older sister's eyes.

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