**How To Let Young Siblings Know You Care**

We asked over fifty adult brothers and sisters:

**When you were younger, what did your parents, other family members, and service providers do to make you feel special and let you know they cared?**

This is what they told us.

Don Meyer and Cristina Breshears

© The Sibling Support Project.  All rights reserved.

I felt special when others made an effort to find out what my interests were and what was going on in my life and talked to me about them. When family members or close family friends talked to me about my life without making my sib the central part of the conversation, I felt like my life mattered and that my problems were worth addressing &mdash; even if they weren&#39;t related to my sib.

My mom is good at complementing people she really likes. Growing up, she often complemented me on my accomplishments, skills, and spirit&mdash;and still does. That helped a lot!

I really appreciated when one of my parents, or even a family friend, took time to really focus on what was going on with me&mdash;just me&mdash;and my life. This was especially important during my teen years.

My parents made me feel special by letting me know that they were proud of my achievements, and they attended as many of my soccer games and concerts as they could. My mom especially would make time to take me to places that she and I especially enjoyed (like the art museum). These were memorable events!

My typically-developing sister and I had a wonderful neighbor. Although she had her own children, she always took time to talk to us about what we were up to. I enjoyed art, and my sister enjoyed writing, and she was the one adult in our lives who knew anything about our passions. It&#39;s not that she spent a lot of time asking us about us, but it was powerful to have an adult listen to us with such interest.

Every night, my mother would always ask me to tell her one thing about my day.

When I was a child, my mother made every effort to attend my school functions&mdash;plays, choir, etc. It was a big deal to have my mom in the audience cheering just for me. My siblings (all nine of them!) were not with her.

I always appreciated when people acknowledged that I knew as much about my brother as my parents did. And I also liked people simply inquiring about MY interests and asking how I was doing.

When a service provider did something as simple as remember my name and ask me how my day was, it made me feel acknowledged and appreciated.

The priest and youth pastor at my church knew me better than my sister and they always greeted me and asked how I was doing. I liked that they didn&#39;t ask me about my sister every time they talked to me. And I appreciated it when teachers treated me like an individual and not an extension of my sibling.

A nun at my sister&#39;s program once asked me if I could help her with something, and then she took me to the kitchen. She gave me cookies and asked me all kinds of questions about me: what I like to do, what my favorite subject was, and who was my best friend. Wow! I was about five or so (47 years ago!) and that ten minutes remains a shining moment for me.

When I was in fifth grade, a service provider who frequently visited our home made a point of asking my mom about me: How I was doing in school? Did I have friends and activities? How was life at home for me? The service provider didn&#39;t ask me these questions, but just her asking my mom about me felt like I was on center stage!

Growing up, I was always treated as an individual&mdash;that was never questioned. And my parents had similar expectations for the both of us.

My parents made me feel like I was an important part of our family and that I had a role to play. From a young age, I was independent and didn&#39;t expect much from others because I knew my brother needed them more than I did. So when anyone acknowledged me, it was a gift.

My family let me know that it was okay for me to have an identity of my own. Having others acknowledge me and show interest in my life made me realize that my life did not need to be defined by my sibling&#39;s disability. Indeed, what person should be defined by an illness or disability? Not the person with a disability, and certainly not their typical sibling(s)!

I was generally expected to not take up too much space or attention, and I learned to be okay with that. But small kindnesses always made me feel so important. To a little girl, that&#39;s everything.

My parents made me feel important and like I mattered. It made me feel like I had a little bit of control (whether I did or not!) and that I was indeed separate from my sister and had options about my future.

My parents let me know I mattered. They made me feel like I could pursue my dreams without feeling selfish. They taught me about love and family. They allowed me to focus on my school work, excel as a student and athlete, attend a top university, and ultimately pursue medicine as a profession. Without these gestures and letting me know that I mattered, I&#39;m not sure any of this would have been possible.

Every child in a family is different. I am fiercely independent and always determined to be my own person. Being treated as my own person&mdash;and not as an extension of my sister&mdash;was very important to me.

The nun who gave me cookies and talked with me gave me my first real sense of individuality. I felt like a person, not just my sister&#39;s little sister. Not just the &#34;other one.&#34; I felt seen for who I am and separate from my sister and her diagnosis.

When you go to therapy (speech, OT, PT, etc.), you are clearly there for your sibling. It is all about them. When providers greet young siblings and talk to them, we feel acknowledged.

It helped to know that my parents cared for me as an individual. They saw my strengths, and this made life a bit easier during those times when they couldn&#39;t be as available due to my sister&#39;s disability.

My parents acknowledge <em>*me</em>*. It wasn&#39;t always &#34;me-and-my-sister&#34; or always &#34;my sister.&#34; They acknowledge me as a separate and individual person.

Growing up, I needed to feel like a separate individual. I can&#39;t emphasize that enough. It was confusing being linked to my brother all the time. My brother&#39;s behaviors would cast a spotlight on me that I didn&#39;t want.

I had two teachers at school who asked about me, who cared how I was doing, who asked if I was getting out enough, and if I needed anything. They also asked about my sib&mdash;but their focus was on me. They were a great encouragement to me.

Don&#39;t let life revolve around the sick child. Siblings have lives, personalities and aspirations that they want to talk about. Don&#39;t remind them of their family&#39;s hardships more than necessary. Remind them of the great things.

I&#39;m especially grateful that they were equally as &#34;tough&#34; on both of us. Sometimes my desires would be secondary to my brother&#39;s, but occasionally the inverse would be true. On my birthday, we went where I wanted to go even if my brother didn&#39;t like it.

My sister&#39;s speech pathologist always gave me a lollipop if my sister got one. Her office had lots of toys for me to play with and a special cabinet just for siblings. When I got older, she always took time to talk to me at the end of the session and asked about my life outside of bringing my sister to her office.

My folks raised us in a culture of independence because my parents wanted my sister to exert her independence. But this mindset helped us all. My parents taught all of us solid life lessons: personal responsibility, managing money, and the value of lifelong learning.

My sister and I share a room. My mom and dad always kissed us goodnight and they still do. It&#39;s nice! ;)

Growing up, my sib had chores just like the rest of us &mdash; I really appreciate that now.

My parents wanted my sister to have as much independence as possible, and didn&#39;t want her to be a burden to me. They never forced me to babysit her or include her when my friends came to our house. They treated each of our challenges and milestones as equally important.

All the kids in our family&mdash;including my brother&mdash;had to do our best, be honest, care for others, and serve somebody.

In our family, there were strict rules. After my brother destroyed some of my toys, my parents made a rule he couldn&#39;t go in my room, and they enforced it. We both had chores to do. This made it seem fair. They protected my right to privacy.

When my dad was alive, he was adamant that we were not to be treated differently within the family. After he died, my mom always made sure that we knew that we were all special and that we were going to be okay. She sought out resources so my brother could become independent as possible. She also sought resources that allowed me to go to school and start a career. Our dreams were never downplayed or put second to anything.

My sister who has Down syndrome was expected to help with cleaning and cooking, as was I.

We all had to do chores, which I suppose is a good thing.

My mother taught us all to be responsible and she assigned chores in in a natural way. I remember her saying &#34;set the table&#34; to me and &#34;cut the grass&#34; to my brother. It was never &#34;he can&#39;t&#34; or &#34;you have more skills.&#34; We just did what she said and when she said it.

My sister was expected to do what everyone else in the family did. Expectations were high. For example, we went on family bike rides. She wanted to go but wouldn&#39;t pedal her own bike. My parents knew she was capable. When we went on family bike rides without her, she&#39;d be at the curb holding her handlebars, with someone at the house to watch her. After this happened a few times, she let go of her fears and learned to ride her bike. She still rides a bike today, 50 years later.

I remember my mom telling me that she loved us equally but in different ways. She always said that even though sometimes it appeared that my brother got more attention than I did, or it seemed that he never got in trouble, I was also special.

I grew up in a home where everyone was treated equally. Even though I&#39;m sure my sister got special attention, it felt like we were all held to the same standard.

When my parents were preoccupied with my brother, they were always quick to let me know they still loved me. Even though I didn&#39;t get as much of their time, it was enough to know that their love was shared equally between my brother and me. If I asked about it&mdash;which I often did&mdash;they would say that love is infinite, and that their love for my brother and for me would never be used up, and that one does not affect the other at all. I can&#39;t say they were always honest with me, but they knew that I did not deserve to be lied to about the important things. Their honesty let me know that they cared about me.

My dad set high expectations for himself and all of us. He had polio as a child and despite issues with his speech and fine motor control he put himself through college and became a chemist. I became a special education teacher and I now set high expectations for my students. They often amaze their parents and other staff by what they can accomplish because of this attitude&mdash;just as my disabled siblings have amazed others through the years. Expect more, get more.

I asked my dad a lot of questions about my sister and her future, which he always answered honestly. I appreciated his honesty and willingness to talk about hard things with me.

I appreciated my family for creating a plan for my sibling&#39;s future that would give me responsibility when I was ready, but not before, and carefully explaining it to me.

From the start, my parents set everything up so that in the event of a death my sister would be cared for. I think they did this for their own peace of mind and also for my well-being.

My dad took me aside for a heart-to-heart conversation. He became pretty emotional and told me he was sorry that my sister was a burden and that they tried very hard to make it not be. I never really thought of her as a burden and taking care of her after they passed was always the obvious choice for me. But it meant a lot to me to hear that from him.

My father passed away when my mother was pregnant with my sibling, so my mother worked long hours. My sister and I were caregivers for our brother, and our mother always made it clear that we would always be our brother&#39;s caregivers. I know that for some siblings, this wouldn&#39;t be a comfort, but for my sister and me, it was an honor. It made us feel that we were doing a good job, and that we were thought to be capable people.

I realize this now as an adult and I&#39;m very thankful: Growing up, my parents never made me feel like caring for my brother was my responsibility. They only asked me to babysit once out of desperation! I was able to go away to college and &#34;do my own thing&#34; without guilt. As adult, I assume some responsibilities, but because of my parents&#39; approach, I&#39;m very close with my sib and involved in his care&mdash;with no resentment. My parents have also done an amazing job of planning for my sib&#39;s future. They have always included me in the process, asked for my advice, and let me know that they value my opinion with it comes to my sib.

My mother always said, &#34;Do not bring your brothers into your home when I die. That&#39;s too much responsibility and too hard on a marriage.&#34; Then, in a stern tone, she&#39;d continue: &#34;Listen to me: I *do* expect you to make sure they are taken care of. When family checks on them, they are better cared for than if just left somewhere&#34;. I appreciate both her removing the guilt of not taking direct care of them and yet the firm lesson in the importance of looking after them.

My parents have been very careful to plan for my sister&#39;s future, both financially and practically. They have also said that they don&#39;t want my sister to feel like a burden.

My parents tried to make sure that when they died my two brothers would be already &#34;taken care of&#34; with a placement of their own. They felt it was important that my sister and I have our own lives and my brothers would their own as well.

My mom spent an enormous amount of time and energy planning for my sibling&#39;s future. While she was planning, she would always talk about how important this was for my brother&mdash;which it absolutely was. But I realize now the impact this had on me. My parents worked extremely hard to show they cared. I knew my parents cared about me as an individual, and that made a big difference. Investing in my education, caring about my future, and caring about my extracurricular activities made a huge difference.

It&#39;s important for parents and providers to recognize that children understand more than is thought. You can&#39;t always protect them, so please inform them!

Talk to the &#34;well&#34; sibling and keep them apprised of the situation on whatever level they can understand. I hated being left out of the family.

My parents gave me creative tools and access to books and let me do my own exploring and learning. They helped when I needed them, but they stayed out of my way and let me learn on my own.

My parents never put any pressure on me to follow a particular academic path. They only asked that I try my best and reach my full potential. This helped any pressure I had about &#34;making up&#34; for my brother, which many siblings feel like it is their job to do.

My parents made it a habit to encourage each of their children&mdash;disabled or not&mdash;to pursue their own interests. So my sister with a disability was encouraged to do things that were compatible with her interests and needs, and the same went for my other typical sibs and me. That way, we were each allowed to be an individual, without our individuality being sacrificed because of a disability.

My parents always made sure I had a good education and had the opportunity to do extracurricular activities. They wanted me to pursue my passions. Even though we didn&#39;t have a ton of money, they would find ways for me to participate in sports, helped me get a scholarship to a private high school and top college, and celebrated my accomplishments.

My parents wanted me to have a life of my own. There were months in which that didn&#39;t happen, but they always wanted it.

My parents definitely supported all of us going to college, having our own careers and lives. We all had household responsibilities&mdash;and we all hated them ;). My brother is fairly high functioning, so he was treated the same in these ways. And my parents did focus on each of us individually as they could.

They really pushed me to have a separate life&mdash;whether it was sports or other extracurricular events. They wanted me to have time away from my brother to figure out who I am, and what I want. They always told me he wasn&#39;t my responsibility and tried to keep me very focused on my own success.

My dad let me go away to university even though my mother wanted me to stay home. Amazing.

They always made an effort to let me know that I had permission to live my own life and supported me no matter what. When I was younger my brother got more attention then I did. My mom was aware of this and made plans to do things just with me. They did the best anyone could have done.

When I was 15, I wrote a paper about autism for an English class. The research I did hit me particularly hard one day, so I cried. When Mom asked what was wrong, I replied that I was worried for my sister&#39;s future. Mom simply replied, &#34;I don&#39;t worry.&#34; She wanted me to live my own life for myself, for as long as possible. It was an empowering moment. I was far less nervous about moving away and going to college because of that.

After high school, I had a conversation with my dad about my sister&#39;s future. He thought I should live life as fully as I can and for as long as I possibly can. He told me that when I&#39;m older, when the time comes to plan for Lindsey&#39;s future, we would cross that bridge together. Knowing that Dad is willing to have inevitable conversations about the future is heartwarming.

It was so important that my parents believed in my success and encouraged me to pursue my passions. It helped me believe that I could do great things and that my life was more than what existed in my family.

Parents need to make sure the typical children in the home get a childhood. My brother is my life, but as a child and as a teen I was expected to care for my brother after school for several hours and often on weekends. Every three-month summer was spent home watching my brother. No after school activities or sports. No going to the pool when all my friends went. Give the sibs as &#34;normal&#34; a life as is possible and don&#39;t expect them to take on these adult roles at such a young age.

This didn&#39;t apply to me as our family was too big, but sibs need some space of their own. There are many aspects of life with a person with a disability is invasive. Things that should be private are too often public. Sibs need safe spaces.

When I was younger, my parents were always very clear with me about my sister&#39;s condition. I liked that because I felt trusted and important.

My parents treated me with a great deal of respect, and took my opinions seriously. If I had ideas about how my sib&#39;s behavioral therapy could be improved, they tried to integrate that. I&#39;m not sure I advocate this however, as it changes the status of the neuro-typical child to that of a quasi co-parent.

Sometimes we&#39;d have a &#34;family conference&#34; when we needed to talk something through in order to make a good decision. We&#39;d all sit down together and everyone had a voice. I think the principle was a good one, and I would recommend it.

My father laid it all out for me and kept me informed about my brother&#39;s illness. He treated me as an intellectual being with the capacity to understand.

My parents withheld some information about the severity of my brother&#39;s situation. As a result, I didn&#39;t treat it&mdash;or them&mdash;with the sensitivity it deserved. I realize now that they were just trying to protect me. However, I think it is important to give siblings as much information as is developmentally appropriate, so they feel included.

My mother used to put little notes in my lunch box. But both my parents always devoted time to me, especially when I got to my teenage years. We spent a lot of time talking. To this day, they always tell me they love me and always give me meaningful advice.

My parents always made time for me to go out with just them when I was younger&mdash; &#34;quality time,&#34; if you will.

I also really appreciated when my parents gave me time alone with my friends, without my brother around.

My dad would read a chapter of a book with me every night before bed. It was never a rule that my sister wasn&#39;t allowed in the room&mdash;but he made sure she wasn&#39;t.

My mom and my aunt would sometimes take me out shopping&mdash;just the three of us. They&#39;d give me lots of choices, such as &#34;what store do you want to go to?&#34; or &#34;what do you want for lunch?&#34; They gave me those choices because when my sister was around, we had much less flexibility.

My mom took time to be the leader of my Girl Scout Troup for a few years. It&#39;s when I realized my mom was creative and fun!

My mom and I had a really hard time for a big portion of my childhood. She was stressed because she was a single mother to my brother and me. Then, in sixth grade, she started lying in bed with me after putting my brother to bed and before going to bed herself. We would just talk about anything and everything, and those fifteen to thirty minutes of uninterrupted time with her every day put our relationship on the right track.

For my birthday every year, my parents would let me choose a parent to go out to dinner with so that I would have time with one of them alone to celebrate. Occasionally, one of my parents would take me on a day trip somewhere. Those are some of my fondest memories.

My mom would take me out for &#34;coffee&#34; from time to time&mdash;just the two of us. That meant a lot.

My dad started a tradition when I was two. Every year on my half-birthday we had a daddy-daughter date. We would go to a fancy restaurant (white table cloths and candles required) and he wore his special tie. It was nice to do it on my half-birthday because it was like an extra bonus night all to myself. I wish I would have had a similar tradition with my mom because it&#39;s really important to get some alone time with parents.

Any time I got alone with my parents was awesome&mdash;going grocery shopping with my mom and fishing with my dad, whatever! I appreciated when family members or people from church asked me about my life, how I was, how school was going before they asked me about my brother. Letting me have a say about things made me feel important and cared for. My brother and I are twins so when I got to have my own special birthday cake, and help make it, I loved it.

My parents made a concerted effort to do some &#34;normal&#34; things. As difficult as it would be, we went out to dinner sometimes and even went on family vacations. My parents also made an effort to send some time just with me. My dad coached my soccer team &mdash;and I knew that was just for me, not for my sibling with a disability.

I had special one-on-one activities with each parent. My parents also did not let my brother mess with my stuff and had strict rules about whether he could go in my room or touch my things.

My mom made sure that once a month we had one day for just the two of us. We would go out to breakfast, then sometimes just run errands all day. I just enjoyed spending time with her one-on-one. The other thing we did was at night when she cooked dinner. I would sit in the kitchen and talk with her about everything, anything and nothing.

Our grandmother spent equal time and money on each grandkid. We each spent one week with her every summer. She you feel like you were the only important person in the world.

My mother set aside time each month for us to cook our way around the world, celebrating other cultural dishes.

My dad and I had a date jar, where we put in spare change until we had enough to do something I wanted to do.

During my sister&#39;s longest hospitalization, I was living with just my dad while my mom and my sister stayed at the hospital. My dad and I would visit the hospital every weekend. But during the week of my birthday, my mom and dad switched places and I got to spend a special week with her.

I grew up with close relatives (aunts and grandparents) in addition to my mom, dad, and sib. My parents would arrange sleepovers and outings for me with those other relatives and I remember loving those events. Also, because of my sib&#39;s challenges, we couldn&#39;t go on some of the vacations that other families go on&mdash;Disney World, road trips, etc. But I did take those trips with my grandparents and we had a great time.

My dad would take me to sports events. It was our together time away from the family.

I grew up with essentially a single parent. Mom would leave me notes, sometimes hand-made cards, expressing how dear I am to her. They always made me feel so special.

My mom and I had &#34;dates&#34; and even though I am now 20, we still have them! We would do something that I wanted to do. It might be going to a movie, dinner, or just wandering around downtown at the market in the summer. It was sometimes only an hour, or sometimes a full afternoon. Regardless of what we did, it made me feel so special and gave me that one-on-one time that I really needed. I know planning this was sometimes difficult for her, especially if my brother was having a bad day. But she always made it happen one way or another. She always said that she loves us equally, just in different ways. It is one thing that has stuck in my mind and heart for a long time.

Both of my parents made time for me. My mom was my Girl Scout leader and my dad shared his love of gardening with me. They also made sure to celebrate any of my accomplishments and made sure my birthday was a big deal. In a house with lots of kids, I&#39;m sure that was not easy!

Getting respite was a lifesaver. It meant that we could have mother-daughter time.

Simple one-on-one time together outside of the house. A lunch, dinner, or shopping trip. It meant everything.

One of my parents would always read me a bedtime story. It was a very sacred ritual for us. If for any reason my sibling or something else interfered with story time, I always got two stories the next evening.

My brother had a tutor who came to our house once a week. She would always bring her laptop with a couple of different computer games I could play during the hour she spent working with him.

I loved my brothers&#39; behavior specialists when I was little. During breaks I&#39;d often go over and talk to them about what I was doing in school, movies I liked, or whatever happened to be on my mind. Most of the behavior specialists were young and I think they really enjoyed teaching children so they talked to me and engaged with me.

One of my grade six teachers sensed my struggle. I am grateful to her and am still in touch with her.

When I was a toddler, there were nuns who came to our home to do physical therapy and range of motion exercises with my brother. The nuns let me help them and made me feel included and visible.

Mrs. B. was a resource teacher at my elementary school. When my mom came to school to talk to her about my sister, Mrs. B. would always walk over and hand me a book. A simple gesture but a big impact.

My sister&#39;s longest-ever hospital stay included the week of my birthday. The Child Life workers at the hospital surprised me with a big basket of really cool presents. I&#39;m pretty sure I cried with joy. Without a doubt, it was one of the moments in my life when I felt most appreciated.

The OT and PT department of the therapy center where my brother received services always let me play with the toys at the end of the session while they talked to my mom.

My parents always listened to my dreams and took time to support them. My dad in particular always was able to find time, even if we had to schedule a meeting, to talk to me about my plans for college, finances, moving, etc.

My mother made sure to let me know that I didn&#39;t have to make up for my sister&#39;s disability. She used respite and even took me to a sibling group.

As I got older I felt more and more uncomfortable being out in public with my brother&mdash;to the point of not going out on most family outings. Time with just my parents and myself was invaluable.

It is good to know that you are as much a part of the family as your sibling&mdash;and that your parents actually acknowledge you and care for you and let you know that you can always talk to them if you have any problems. It&#39;s not all about the disabled person.

Having alone time with one of my parents allowed me to have their undivided attention. Even though it didn&#39;t happen very often, it made me feel very special.

When another sibling requires more attention to receive the same or even lesser success, it is important to know that the lack of attention is not because you aren&#39;t loved as much. Although saying it is helpful, actions always speak louder than words. We just want parents to make time for us and feel included in the family as a whole.

Getting one-on-one time with one of my parents allowed me to get some needed attention. In the end, it helped foster and maintain my relationships with my parents.

Spending time to talk about anything, everything, and nothing with my mom was&mdash;and is&mdash;so important to me. Even as an adult, people don&#39;t always listen or understand and you are always fighting for uninterrupted attention. My mom always gives me that undivided attention. She never judges, she just listens and understands.

I think the simple act of asking how my day was helped. It showed me that I was noticed, and gave me needed attention. Knowing that my needs are just as important as my brother&#39;s led to an overall more trusting environment in the house.

Even something as simple as an hour and a half at an ice cream parlor can make a huge difference to a typical sib. Years later, I can still remember that ice cream!

Have one or two close family member or friends demonstrate greater interest in the sibling than the disabled child. They&#39;d ask first about the sibling before the disabled child when they meet and show special concern and interest in the typically developing sibling. This person would make the sibling feel like they are the &#34;special one&#34; to at least one person.

My mom actually discovered the SibTeen Facebook page for me and it&#39;s been so great.

My mom found a Sibshop just for me when I was really young. It meant so much to me to hang out with other kids who knew what it was like to have sister with autism.

Probably the most special thing that my parents did was sign me up for Sibshops. This gave me a safe place to talk about my sib, positive or not. I was always frustrated at my sib for doing something. I always blamed him and did not see how his disability was a part of his not seeing things clearly. Sibshops opened my eyes to that concept. Once I become more comfortable with my sib, I opened up to my parents about how I felt about my sib. It changed my life.

My parents sent me to Sibshops and made a point of asking me how my day was and conversing with me.

The summer before high school my mom and dad &#34;made&#34; me volunteer at a camp for kids with special needs (like my brother) and they said I &#34;had&#34; to try it out for two days and if I didn&#39;t like it I could stop. I never left and to this day I still visit the camp regularly! It pretty much functioned as my &#34;Sibshop&#34; which did not exist at the time. I met other sibs and some lifelong friends who genuinely understand me and my brother.

When I was younger my mom took me to a sibling panel where I spoke to younger kids about what it was like to be a sibling of a person with a disability. It really showed me that I wasn&#39;t alone.

Our pediatrician spent as much time on my concerns as she did on my sister&#39;s concerns. I always felt heard by her.

My parents let us know they loved us equally, valued each of our interests equally, were aware of the strain that dealing with disability caused, and tried to address it. Their efforts also let me know that they were open to hearing my views, questions, and problems. Perhaps even more importantly, was that my parents allowed my sister&#39;s and my relationship to develop organically, without force or facilitation, and they enabled us to interact as sisters, not as caregiver/care recipient.

Meeting other sibs helps so much! It means the world to us to make new friends who won&#39;t judge our siblings&mdash;or us!

It&#39;s good to meet others who have a sibling with a disability. They provide insights and know what my life is like on a daily basis.

No one asked me what it was like to have a sibling with a disability until I was 17. Being asked to share my story&mdash;validation that my story actually mattered&mdash;gave me the chance to process that narrative in a way that helped me better understand who I was in relation to my sister. In dialogue, we learn far more about ourselves than we ever can when we are left talking to ourselves alone.

We want to know that you know we are going through a tough time and that it is okay to have negative feelings about our sibling. Young siblings need to know that it is OK not to be perfect and that they are just as important as their disabled sibling. Often, we feel alone because we have no one else to talk to about our feelings. The people that we want to talk to&mdash;our parents&mdash;are occupied with our disabled sibling.

Having open conversations about the challenges of having a sibling with a disability is a gift that a lot of siblings are never given.

It&#39;s important to offer support to siblings, through Sibshops or other groups where sibs can meet other sibs. I think the best things parents can do for young sibs is to spend time with them, acknowledge difficulties, and provide an atmosphere where it is safe for all to voice their opinions and feelings, even when they are difficult. Protecting siblings from physical or verbal aggressions (if the affected sibling has these) is really important too.

What can we do to support young sibs? Schools can connect students who are sibs with other sibs and make counseling a more available option. Teach young sibs how to tell their friends about their sib. Teach sibs self-defense if their sib has a tendency to be violent. Have respite services so that the sib and family can have a break every couple of months and experience life for a weekend as all typical people do. Let sibs be more involved in the choices affecting them.

I want young sibs to have a &#34;safe place&#34; to express positive <em>*and</em>* negative feelings about their family. I want them to have people in their life who can give them regular, quality attention for themselves.

I am a sib and work with young brothers and sisters. Some have a hard time talking to people about difficult situations. We have encouraged parents and siblings to share a journal that they can write to each other in. This gives them a chance to get their feelings out right away when their parents are not able to talk with them.

Young sibs don&#39;t always have a voice. It brightens their world to know that they have been heard. When they&#39;re heard, they can over come obstacles and live their life to their absolute best. It lets them know that they are valued, they are acknowledged, and they are cared for.

I think it&#39;s important for parents to acknowledge typically-developing siblings&#39; accomplishments, big AND small, even if it&#39;s just with a verbal &#34;well done&#34; or &#34;I&#39;m proud of you. and I hope you&#39;re proud of yourself, too.&#34;

I also always really appreciated it when therapists and tutors would offer to let me participate in whatever they were doing. (Note the use of the word &#34;offer.&#34; It has to be a choice, not a mandate.)

We had to drive to see a doctor in another state every month. He made sure I was included in conversations and made sure I wasn&#39;t forgotten. He told my mom that every time we made the trip we had to do something fun.

My mom always listened to and valued my opinions about things that were going on with my brother. She was careful to remember and remind people that I was a part of what was going on, too. I might not have made very helpful comments, but it made me feel like a part of his life instead of just a bystander. Being included started me on a path to becoming an advocate for my brother.

Those who acknowledge siblings make us feel seen. Too often, we feel invisible.

Acknowledging sibs&#39; efforts makes us feel hopeful.

My parents&#39; attitude regarding my sister&#39;s disability shaped my own beliefs. They helped me see the world as a rich, diverse place full of people who all deserve respect and love.

Even the smallest reassurance can make someone&#39;s day.

My parents always showered me with love and affection. When it came time to talk to them about something, they would focus all their attention on me.

Because my sib had many needs, my parents didn&#39;t always have time to focus solely on me. Still, they let me know that I was loved and appreciated. Hearing this can make up for all the attention your sib might be getting.

Give the kids a hug! That&#39;s one of the best things you can do. Hugs feel great.