



# SibsCONNECT

## Caregiver Resource Packet

Packet Includes:

- **Caregiver information & Resources**
- **Tips & Strategies**
- **Needs of a Sibling**



*A 12-Week Program for Siblings!*

# Conversations About Autism

*Have the conversation early, often and on going*

First, **learn more about autism**. Have a general understanding so you feel ready to answer questions your children may have.

Let your children know that **they have a safe space** and that they can talk about their thoughts, feelings and concerns without your judgement or consequences.

**Consider the age of your children.** They may not understand everything. Young children may only pick up on the traits of their sibling with autism, such as not using words or playing with the same object repeatedly. Older children may wonder more about what autism is and what that means for their sibling relationship.

**Ask the siblings:**  
*"Do you have any questions? What are your thoughts and feelings?"*

**Keep the conversation going.** Sibling needs may change as time goes on. Adapt to their needs and developmental stage, and be willing to chat when concerns or questions arise.



## Reminder!

The sibling relationship is the longest lasting relationship in the family. The more they know and the earlier, the more equipped they are to foster a healthy relationship throughout the lifespan.



# Special Time

## *Creating time for each child*

Often, your child on the autism spectrum may require more attention, so it can be challenging to **ensure your other children feel important as well**. Special time is a scheduled time for the siblings to spend time alone with their caregivers(s).

### Activity Ideas

- Reading before bed
- Grocery shopping
- Go to the movies
- Bake some cookies
- Go to the park

**Utilize Respite!** A respite worker can provide support and care for autistic individuals to provide caregivers a chance to do other things they need or want to do, such as spend time with their other children. Autism Nova Scotia offers a respite database for families looking for that extra support for a quick break.

**Special time should be consistent.** You can plan something small for every day, such as helping prep dinner. Then, weekly you could do groceries together. Monthly, you could schedule a whole afternoon dedicated to one on one time. This can be with one or both caregivers.

**Have your children choose** what special time with you looks like. Ask them what activities they would like to do, you can offer some suggestions as well for them to choose from.

***Scheduling special time gives them something to look forward to!***



# Sibling Interactions

## *Foster positive sibling communication*

Siblings can learn patience, the use of appropriate praise and other communication techniques to positively interact with their sibling on the autism spectrum through you **modeling these types of interactions**.

**Both children can make choices** on how and when they interact. Siblings of a person with autism may have extra responsibility in looking out for their sibling. This is okay, but they should also have play time together and apart as well.

**Help your children create a safe space.** Sometimes there may be some challenges with behaviours or within the home setting. Consider working with the sibling to find a place within your home where they (and their belongings) can have some personal space!

***Do your children have any similar interests? If they both like a certain video game they could play it together sometimes!***

**It's okay if not every interaction is positive.** When siblings have a negative interaction, discuss what happened and allow the siblings a chance to explain. Listen, acknowledge and validate their experience, and work with them to overcome it.

This is a great game, thanks for introducing me to it!



# Time With People Who 'Get it'

Siblings of those who are on the autism spectrum have a unique life experience, but it is important that they do not feel alone. **Let them know that many people are in similar situations.**

Understanding that there are other people who have siblings with disabilities will help them feel less alone in their experience.

**Ensure they have one-on-one time with other siblings!** This could be siblings in the family, or siblings of other kids with autism. Just as you need friends to talk to, siblings do too.

Have you heard of **SibsCONNECT**?  
It's a 12-week program for siblings aged 9-12 helping to maintain a positive outlook in a fun and supportive environment!



*"[A support group] is a place where I felt like I could talk to people about how I was feeling, and they would understand."*

-OAR Contributor

**Be open and honest about your experience too.** If they are struggling with their feelings and thoughts, it could be helpful for them to know you struggle sometimes too. Assure them you are someone they can talk to.

Sources: The Autism Program at Boston Medical Centre, Sibling Resource packet  
Indiana Resource Center for Autism

Organization for Autism Research (OAR): Life as an autism sibling

# Family Life

## *Opportunities for positive family interactions*

Siblings of someone on the autism spectrum may feel they are **missing out on routine family experiences**. It's important for both caregivers and siblings to have family time that is not focusing all energy on the child with autism. It can be challenging to navigate this balance, so it's important to utilize resources in your community to help you achieve a positive family dynamic.

**Keep an eye out for family-friendly community events.** Look into autism-friendly events that the whole family can enjoy. Agencies such as *Autism Nova Scotia* often host events for families and individuals with disabilities to come together as a community and have fun!



**Have time together as a family.** This could be as simple as eating dinner together, or having a movie night. Regular family time can bring a sense of routine into an otherwise hectic environment.

**Incorporate fairness in daily activities.** Try to assign chores as equally as possible. Sometimes siblings may feel they have more responsibility than their sibling on the autism spectrum. Differential treatment is to be expected for various reasons, but it's important not to underestimate the abilities of your child with autism.





# Information and Education

*As you learn more about autism,  
teach the siblings about it too!*

**Provide your children strategies for answering questions about their sibling with autism.** If the children are school aged, they may find other kids ask them questions about why their sibling is 'different.' Prepare them to answer these questions respectfully.

**Encourage your children to continue learning and advocate for their sibling and themselves.**

Siblings may feel proud if they can help make a difference in the school or community for their sibling on the autism spectrum. **Advocating for themselves is important too.** Too often we're seeing that siblings feel they have to advocate for the sibling with autism but don't know how to do so for themselves.

***Siblings don't always have to answer people's questions. You and them can decide who deserves to know what.***

**Embrace the natural learning opportunities** that come with having a sibling on the autism spectrum. Life skills such as patience, sharing, empathy, teamwork and leadership are evident in siblings of someone with autism. They can draw on this life experience in many different avenues as they grow.



# References

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