



# SibsCONNECT

## Service Provider Resource Packet

Packet Includes:

- **Service Provider Information**
- **Sibling Perspectives**
- **Tips & Strategies**
- **Needs of a Sibling**



# From a Sibling

Although my brother and I are nearly 8 years apart, we attended the same all-grade school for multiple years. School is a place he struggled because while he is super intelligent, the social aspects and the expectations of the classroom were challenging for him. When I was older I began inserting myself in school meetings regarding his education plan as I knew tips and tricks that worked, however, had I been asked earlier, maybe school wouldn't have been so hard for so long. We siblings have a lot to share when provided with the opportunity!



# Involving the Sibling

## *Giving siblings choice and opportunity*

People with autism often have many different appointments and meetings to support them. In a busy household, sometimes the sibling(s) have to accompany the caregivers to these appointments, but are often left out of the room. When possible, **invite the sibling into the appointment too.** They may decline, and that is okay, but **offering this choice** can make them feel seen.

*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 and supportive relationship throughout the lifespan.*

**Asking siblings questions,** is a great way to involve them, but make sure to ask them questions about themselves too! Asking them how they are doing is a good way to get insight on what supports may be needed for them and other family members.

Siblings are often left in the literal and figurative waiting room

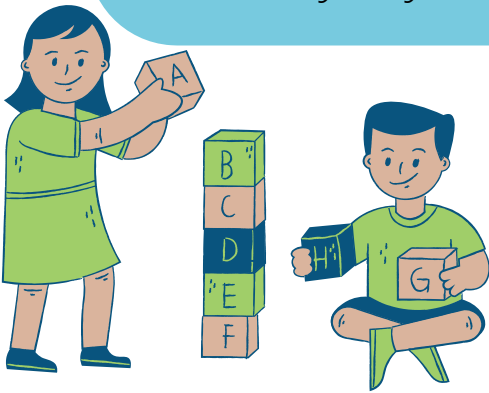


Siblings are an important component of the family life. Service providers can utilize the sibling relationship to learn more about the individual with autism. It is important to **let the siblings know what they offer is very helpful for the service provider to help their autistic sibling.**

# Family Centered Practice

## *Including siblings and caregivers in the care plan*

*Sibling play can be used to strengthen social and communication skills. During activities, it would be beneficial for siblings to sit facing each other. Examples of activities could be crafts, music time, building blocks, etc. Try to find an activity they both enjoy!*



**Family Systems Theory** supports that family dynamics have influence on behaviour outcomes. The **sibling sub-system** is particularly important as it is the first, longest and deepest peer connection that is often foundational to social and behavioural skills.

The family is a great resource in supporting individuals with autism, and often can be part of the therapeutic process. Siblings especially, have a unique relationship that can be used as part of the support processes.

**Provide the opportunity for siblings to be included in directly supporting the autistic individual when possible.**



# Supporting Siblings

*Acknowledge and address the unique needs of siblings*

## Quick Facts:

- Siblings of someone with autism or another disability are more likely to experience psychosocial problems than those without ASD in the family.
- Siblings are more likely to show lower language skills, slower word processing and eye tracking than those without a sibling with autism.
- Siblings sometimes show neurocognitive and behavioural delays, such as repetitive behaviours.
- Siblings can feel significant stress and inner turmoil.
- The younger siblings of an individual with autism are at an increased risk of experiencing antisocial behaviours and externalizing stress responses.
- With proper support and resiliency, siblings of those with autism have been shown to not just adjust, but thrive.

**Saying hello and asking the sibling about themselves** when they attend appointments can make them feel **valued and more comfortable** in the space.

Just as parents are advised to take care of their own well-being, siblings need that support too. This could be through **individualized or family counselling**, or through **peer support groups such as SibsCONNECT**.

*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!*



# Supporting Siblings: Quick Tips!

*Recommendations from siblings to help them out*

- If they are part of the future care plan for their autistic sibling, talk with them about it.
- Relay information in an age-appropriate way, but remember, they may understand more than you may think!
- While having conversations about the well-being of the autistic individual is important, having conversations related to the well-being of the sibling is just as important, too!
- Encourage them to be an individual and pursue their own interests.
- Teach siblings about safe spaces and the importance of having a private space for themselves.
- Actively reach out to siblings.
- Keep learning more about life as a sibling of someone with autism, through reading and talking with siblings directly!





## Further Learning Materials

- Laber-Warren, E. (2020). How autism shapes sibling relationships. <https://www.spectrumnews.org/features/deep-dive/how-autism-shapes-sibling-relationships/>
- Sibling Support Project: How to Let Siblings Know You Care. <https://www.siblingsupport.org/documents-for-site/how-to-let-young-siblings-know-you-care>
- Sibling Support Project: *What Siblings Would Like Parents and Service Providers to Know*. <https://www.siblingsupport.org/documents-for-site/WhatSiblingsWouldLikeParentsandServiceProviderstoKnow.pdf>

## References Used

- Angell, M., Meadan, H. & Stoner, J. (2012). Experiences of siblings of individuals with autism spectrum disorders. *Autism Research and Treatment*, 2012, pp.1-11  
<https://www.hindawi.com/journals/aurt/2012/949586/>
- AshaWire: *Strengthening Families by Involving Siblings in Autism Treatment*. <https://leader.pubs.asha.org/doi/10.1044/leader.FTR1.25042020.48>
- Sibling Support Project: How to Let Siblings Know You Care. <https://www.siblingsupport.org/documents-for-site/how-to-let-young-siblings-know-you-care>
- Sibling Support Project: Supporting Siblings at School. <https://www.siblingsupport.org/documents-for-site/sibs-in-schools-final.pdf>
- Sibling Support Project: *What Siblings Would Like Parents and Service Providers to Know*. <https://www.siblingsupport.org/documents-for-site/WhatSiblingsWouldLikeParentsandServiceProviderstoKnow.pdf>