

# Super Sibs

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*Featuring Super Siblings Alex, Angelica, & Malie*

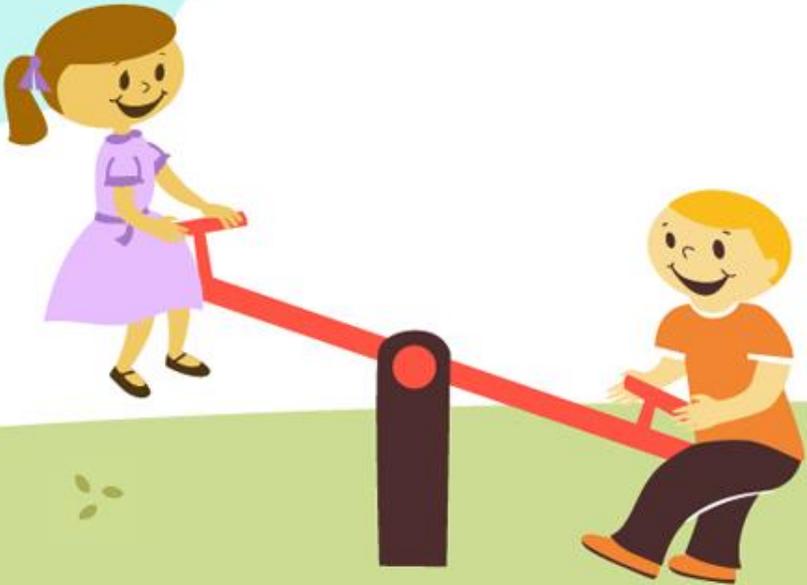


# Agenda

Discussion with Super Siblings

General Overview & Parenting Tips

Questions



# General Overview



- A “special needs child” is defined as having a medical, developmental, or neurological challenge(s) - or other disability - which impacts the *entire family system* and requires *special supports* (e.g., medical, education, behavioral)
- Given the increased demands placed on “special needs families,” siblings of special needs children can often feel overlooked & be in need of emotional support
  - Just as the added stress impacts the parents and special needs child, the “typically developing” sibling(s) is also impacted
    - Studies show higher rates of depression, anxiety, and chronic stress in families - With adequate supports, these issues can be reduced



# What Can You Expect? What is Typical?

- Children see and understand that something is “going on,” is “different” in their family, whether or not you tell them
- Children will have questions
  - What is happening with/to their sibling? Why can't their sibling do certain things? Why does their sibling need certain treatments, devices, etc.? Can they “catch” what the sibling has? Will their sibling get better? How can they help?
- Some sibling rivalry (even when one child has a disability) is to be expected
  - Sharing, fairness, arguments, access to things
  - When to be concerned: if the “rivalry” crosses the line to abuse (*\*discussed later*)



# Typical Emotions Siblings (*May*) Feel

- Guilt about being “typically developing”
- Embarrassment about their sibling’s behavior, appearance, speech, etc.
- Frustrated that their sibling cannot relate to, play with, or do things at the same level (and that they need to assist them)
- Worried about the health and survival of their sibling and the responsibility that may be placed on them in the future
- Resentful
  - Over the attention and support given/diverted to their sibling
  - Regarding the increased need for them to help parents care for their sibling
- Self-Conscious of complaining about their traditional, age-appropriate problems (and feeling they cannot share these with their parents because their sibling “has it worse”)
- Loneliness
  - May believe that people/their parents do not have time for them
  - Feeling that peers do not understand what they are going through
  - Thinking there is no one to talk to who understands their experiences
- **Parentification** = being in a caretaking role of their sibling. \*Is likely to occur when parents do not have adequate support/resources or are not emotionally attuned to the typically developing sibling



# What Parents Can Do to Support the Sibling

- Be open with your child about what is going on and include them in *decision making*
- Help them understand what having a sibling with special needs means to your family (age-appropriate discussion) and allow them to ask questions
  - What is the diagnosis; how will it impact their sibling; what their sibling may need help with; treatment(s) they may need; behaviors, medical needs, or other issues they may experience; sibling's long-term needs.
- Help them determine constructive & appropriate ways to *express & manage their feelings* to make sure their needs are met
  - E.g., talking to you when feeling “left out” instead of acting out by missing curfew
  - Regulating Feelings Involves: (1) Identifying or “labeling” the feeling (2) Rating the feeling; (3) Teaching coping skills to use at each “level”
    - Breathing & relaxation exercises, journaling, physical activity, creative arts (dance or music)
- Make sure they have all the support and resources they need or want
- Acknowledge concerns they may have or demonstrate in their behavior



# Teach (and model) Healthy Communication

## *Why is this important:*

Healthy communication it is a *two-way bridge* connecting you & your child's feelings (more than just getting information = *one-way street*)

- Helps child to build strong relationships with you and others
- Enables the child to develop a healthy self-concept
- Shows the child that they matter and are safe
- Teaches the child to express themselves using words instead of behaviors

## *What You Can Do:*

- Be Available (when the *youth* wants to talk, as much as possible)
- Show Empathy – tune into their feelings and *appreciate* them
- Be a Good Listener = Listen first
  - Ask their ideas and feelings *before* telling yours
  - Try to understand what *they* are trying to tell you
  - You don't have to agree or determine if they are right, *just listen*. When you listen first, the child can calm down and be ready to listen to you later



# But It's Not Fair!

- Being “fair” is important, but it is not the same as being “equal.” Older and younger children may have different privileges, if children understand this they may see things as “fair.”
- Expect that, no matter your efforts, children will sometimes *feel* as if they're not getting a fair share of attention or responsiveness from you.
  - Be prepared for this and explain your decisions
  - Reassure your kids that you do your best to meet *each* of their unique needs
  - Include them in decision making, where possible
  - Make sure to make regular, one-on-one time for each child



# Parenting Tips:

- Let each child be who they are, know they are special in their own way, enjoy their individual talents and successes.
- Make sure each child has enough time and space of their own
  - To do their own thing, play with their own friends without their sibling, have their space and property protected
- Maintain high standards and expectations for all children
  - As much as possible, expect that all children abide by the same rules and receive the same consequences and privileges
- ❖ Be there for *each* child - Set aside “alone time” for each child on a *regular basis*
  - May help to ask, “What are some positive things about your sibling and what are some things that bother you or make you mad? That way, you can keep tabs on the relationship and highlight their positive feelings.
  - Really listen to how your child is feeling about what is going on in the family.



# Parenting Tips Continued:

- Tune in to the individual needs of *each child* in your family
- Don't play favorites. Try not to compare your children to one another. Try to treat your children the same.
- Set your kids up to cooperate rather than compete (e.g., have them race the clock to pick up toys, instead of racing each other).
- Spread the support and encouragement around – notice what *each* child is doing well!
- Keep communication open
  - Consider regular family meetings to discuss and problem solve issues (chores, communication, sharing items) *followed by* a fun family activity (game, dance, sing)



# Things to Consider:

- Pay attention to patterns in *when* conflicts usually occur.
  - Are conflicts right before naps or when children are hungry before meals? Perhaps a change in the routine could help avert conflicts?
- Teach your kids positive ways to get attention from each other (e.g., how to approach and ask their sibling to play, sharing belongings). Also teach them how to respond if their sibling says “no” (compromise, wait until later, schedule a time)
- Plan family activities that are fun for *everyone*. If your kids have good experiences together, it acts as a buffer when they come into conflict.
- **Model SELF-CARE**



# Caring for the Caregiver

- Ask for help
- Talk to someone
  - Friends and family, parent support groups, individual, couples, or family therapy
  - Express your feelings and model “regulating” and responding to difficult feelings for your child
- Utilize Stress Management Techniques
  - Relaxation/Meditation, Exercise, Deep Breathing, \*Simple Pleasures
  - Have fun/Have some you time (scheduled, if needed)
  - Maintain relationships – spouse, other children, friends, family
  - REST

Remember, to take the best possible care of your family  
you must first take care of yourself!



# When to Seek Professional Assistance for Your Typically Developing Child

- Changes in sleeping or eating (too much or too little)
- Constant physical symptoms (e.g., headaches or stomachaches)
- Clear changes in behavior or mood that is in sharp contrast to the child's typical mood or behavior
- Marked depression or anxiety for more days than not
- Perfectionism
- Poor concentration
- Poor self-esteem
- Increased irritability
- Talk of hurting themselves
- Difficulty separating from parents
- Loss of interest in activities
- Isolation or withdrawal
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Frequent crying or worrying
- Drop in grades or absence from school
- Abuse towards sibling



# Signs the Sibling Relationship May be Abusive

NOTE: This can apply to either the special needs child or their sibling

- One child always avoids the other sibling
- A child has changes in behavior, sleep patterns, eating habits, or has nightmares
- A child acts out abuse in play
- A child acts out sexually in inappropriate ways
- The children's roles are rigid (e.g., one child is always the aggressor, the other is always a victim)
- Roughness or violence between siblings increases over time



# The Upside! Siblings *May* Also Feel /Exhibit the Following:

- High level of maturity
- Increased empathy
- Ability to embrace diversity
- Tolerance and acceptance of differences
- Increased emotional intelligence and insight
- Gratitude for their health and vitality
- Resilience
- Creativity and Resourcefulness
- Improved mindfulness
- Improved social skills (reading social cues, relating to others)
- Protectiveness of sibling, anti-bullying sentiments
- Pride in the accomplishments of their special needs sibling



# Resources for Siblings

- Sibling Support Groups – express interest to your current provider
- Sibling Support Project ([www.siblingsupport.org/](http://www.siblingsupport.org/))
  - Local *Sibshop* (peer support groups for school-aged siblings)
    - 8 meetings, over 4 months
    - \$15 for first child \$5 for each children thereafter
    - Meets in Kapolei at the Hawaii Center for Children and Families
      - 7pm on the 2<sup>nd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Fridays
      - Current session started on April 7<sup>th</sup>. Need to attend by the third meeting on May 12<sup>th</sup> or wait until the next Sibshop in September, 2017
  - contact: Jessica Wong-Sumida at (808)368-1191, [autismhi@gmail.com](mailto:autismhi@gmail.com)
  - Learn how to start a Sibshop near you at [www.siblingsupport.org/about-sibshops/want-to-start-a-sibshop](http://www.siblingsupport.org/about-sibshops/want-to-start-a-sibshop)



# Resources for Siblings

- The Arc, Sibling Support Network
  - Locations throughout the state *but* no current sibling support groups – note your interest in starting one near you!
  - Siblings Email List – to receive information about national updates, local efforts, and opportunities in your area (<http://thearcus.wufoo.com/forms/z1ut9c8d02w9d4f/>)
    - Ph: (808)737-7995. Website: <http://www.thearcinhawaii.org>
- Individual Therapy
  - Contact the child's insurance provider to find in-network providers
  - Find a Psychologist: [hawaiipsychology.org](http://hawaiipsychology.org)
- School Counseling & other School-Based Services (after school programs and activities)
  - Contact your child's school



# Resources for Siblings

- Don't forget about Community Programs and *Natural* Supports
  - Big Brothers Big Sisters
    - Ph: (808)524-6111. Website: [www.bbbshawaii.org/](http://www.bbbshawaii.org/)
  - YMCA
    - Ph: (808) 531-YMCA (9622). Website: [www.ymcahonolulu.org/](http://www.ymcahonolulu.org/)
  - Parks & Recreations: sports, clubs, classes
    - Ph: (808) 768-3003. Website: [www.honolulu.gov/parks/program.html](http://www.honolulu.gov/parks/program.html)
  - Church groups, Community Events
  - Activities in *their* area of interest (dance, sports, music, art)
  - Your friends (With similar-aged children? With similar interests?)
  - ❖ *What about you? What do you like to do? Can the child be included?*



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# Questions?

Thank You and Mahalo to Our Super Siblings!

