



Behavioral Directions, LLC
Consulting in Autism & Developmental Disabilities

April 2018

Siblings and Special Needs

In recognition of **World Down Syndrome Day (March 21)** and **Autism Awareness Month (April)** we have centered our current newsletter around supporting the siblings of those with special needs. We know these siblings have a lot to offer!



To create **awareness and support** for our siblings, we offer quotes we compiled as shared by them. We've also done some research and found suggestions brought forth by some of the leading organizations in our field.

What advice would you give someone who has a brother or sister with special needs?

"Patience is key. You may find yourself frustrated with your sibling...but sometimes you just need to take a deep breath, relax, and evaluate how you feel and why you feel that way...you'll come to terms with the differences you have to make in your life to ensure a better life for your sibling. A little bit of selflessness and understanding is necessary to have a healthy relationship with a special needs sibling." - brother, age 17

"Be patient. Don't push [your brother's] buttons (which is very easy to do!)." - sister, age 10

"Be nice to them and try to understand them as much as possible." - brother, age 12



What do you like best about having a brother or sister with special needs?

"This different situation I was in forced me to become more responsible and caring. Helping my parents take care of him made me less self-centered as a person. I became much more patient and understanding with other people, which I've found to help me in my life...learning to care about other people more helps develop more emotional maturity." - brother, age 17

"We get to learn about (their diagnosis/condition) and tell people about it." - brother, age 12

"My older brother has trouble with reading



sometimes. He asks me for help understanding situations in a book he is reading that I have already read like Harry Potter. That makes me feel wise." - sister, age 10

What is the hardest thing about having a brother or sister with special needs?

"It took me a long time to deal with the fact that I wasn't priority number one at all times growing up...it made me frustrated when my parents were too busy to spend time with me. Once I grew up a little bit, I had found my frustration was gone. The only time I'm sour is when I have to stay home from going out to watch him, but I understand that he needs me to be there. Once I came to terms with the changes I needed to make, nothing about my brother really bothers me anymore. We still go out to lunch, go on vacation, and hang out around the house like any normal pair of brothers would. I just have a little more responsibility on my end." - brother, age 17



"At home things run on my brother's schedule" - brother, age 12

"The hardest thing is [my brother] is hard to understand and he thinks differently". - brother, age 8

"If our parents aren't here, the hardest part is taking care of him." - brother, age 12

"It is annoying that we always have to run off to his appointments." - sister, age 10

A recent Washington Post article identified some of the **struggles** these siblings might face, including...

- Feeling like they need to be perfect
- Having a different idea of family and home
- Feeling as though their problems are minimized
- Feeling isolated
- Dealing with intolerance early and often
- Feeling like they are asked to help too much
- Feeling like they must grow up quickly

We identified that there are also **positive effects** for siblings of those with special needs. They are often described to have these **wonderful traits...**

- Patience
- Kindness
- Acceptance of differences
- Compassion
- Helpfulness
- Empathy
- Insight into coping with challenges
- Dependability

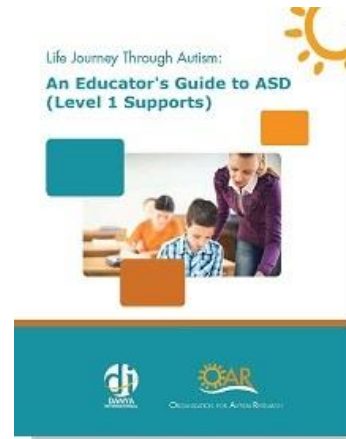
To **combat these struggles**, we offer a few suggestions:

- Encourage each child as an individual
- Regularly promote quality time with each child and between siblings
- Help your child understands their sibling's diagnosis
- Help your child connect with other peers who also have siblings with special needs
- Look into the Sibling Support Project for more resources : <https://www.siblingsupport.org/>
- **Download FREE helpful guides** created by OAR for parents and siblings of someone on the autism spectrum. We think these suggestions can fit for siblings of children with a range of

Hopefully by bringing attention to the unique perspective of siblings of those with special needs, we can celebrate their strengths and better support them in their journey. We encourage parents and caregivers to open communication with that child and become familiar with available tools and resources as a starting point. For additional information visit: [ASAT Online](#) and [The University of Michigan, Medicine](#)

Behavioral Directions in the Community

Our director, Dr. Barbin was excited to offer a recent workshop to disseminate effective methods in Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) at Sprout Therapeutic Riding Center in Aldie, Va.



Download OAR's new Educator's Guide. Dr. Barbin contributed to OAR's latest manual.

Want to learn more about autism, ABA, or managing problem behaviors?

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