

Promoting Positive Sibling Relationships

The sibling bond is unique among family relationships. Despite changes in individual circumstances, sibling relationships are often the longest and can be the most enduring, of any personal relationship. In this day and age, where divorce is on the increase, siblings can often be the only source of an ongoing, stable relationship within the family unit. With couples having fewer children than in the past, the sibling relationship can be more intense and each sibling can have a long-standing influence on each others' lives.

Each Family is Unique.

Growing up with a brother or sister with a hearing loss can be a positive experience for children. These experiences and emotions are dependent upon a number of factors that reflect the unique make up of each individual family. These include the temperament of the sibling, the children's ages, the number of children in the family, the birth order, the socioeconomic status of the family and parental influences.

Modelling Positive Attitude to Deafness

Siblings, and the bond they have between them, can be influenced by parental attitudes regarding the deaf child. For example, siblings' perceptions of their parents' attitudes regarding their hearing impaired child can be extremely influential on their own adjustment. It is important for both parents to model positive attitudes in relation to their child's deafness. This positive attitude radiates to all family members and sets the scene for a happy and healthy family that embraces all family members regardless of difference.

Communication is the key

A key factor in forming strong sibling relationships is their ability to communicate with their siblings. Communication will allow them to understand each other, solve differences



and express emotions. As a rule, young children find it easier than adults to pick up new ways to communicate.

The extra work of communicating with a deaf child can mean that their hearing brothers and sisters are given more responsibility than deaf children. Parents of deaf children may rely on hearing brothers and sisters to do tasks more often, because it can be harder to explain these tasks to a deaf child. This can be difficult for a young child to understand.

Gathering together at meal times can be a challenge but invaluable for building family unity, especially in an age when we are all so connected to technology. Some families use meal time to allow each family member a chance to share information about their day (what was good and not so good about your day?). Make sure there is agreement to take turns when talking or signing, making sure that the deaf member of the family can see everyone and has their turn in sharing information.

Embrace Each Child's Uniqueness

Siblings generally display different personalities and interests and excel

in different areas. Whilst one child may be an able student, the other may excel at sport or social skills.

The key is to encourage the differences but to avoid comparisons and criticisms. By accepting each child's uniqueness and valuing their different skills and natures, parents can help their children to understand that they can all achieve in their own ways. Parents should encourage their children to take an interest in each other's activities as a normal part of family life.

Sharing Time with Mum and Dad

Depending on individual needs, parents share their time amongst children accordingly. It is common for children to feel that their parents spend more time with their deaf child and this may lead to feelings of resentment. Taking time to do something special with each child can help avert this behaviour.

Avoid being the Middle Man

Let your children have practice in working out their own issues and conflicts. According to the parenting book, *Kid Friendly parenting for*

Deaf and Hard of hearing Children (Medwid & Weston, 2002), if you as the parent are more skilled at communicating with the deaf child than siblings, you will likely serve as a go-between. This makes you a vital part of every minor argument and may make you appear

to support one child over another. Early in their relationship, insist that your children learn to communicate with each other. If a fight persists and adult intervention is required, avoid taking sides and listen attentively to each child's point of view.

Many hearing siblings have reported that the experience of growing up in a family with a deaf brother or sister has enriched their lives and make them far more understanding and compassionate people. (Tattersall & Young, 2003). Having a deaf sibling can allow a child to have a positive attitude toward's people's differences. It can also provides a deeper understanding of good communication and a greater level of maturity.



References:

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