Special Considerations when Viewing Autism Through the Eyes of Siblings

- Autism is a diagnosis that baffles to parents and professionals alike.
- Developmentally, siblings may not be able to truly understand autism and other related disabilities.
- The lack of overt physical signs and physical features may render certain disabilities, such as autism, less comprehensible to siblings than other types of disabilities.

Some More Special Considerations

- Given their developmental status, siblings may feel particularly threatened and intimidated by puzzling and/or atypical behavior.
- Siblings may feel isolated and may not have an awareness that there are many others who have brothers or sisters with a disability (i.e., that they are not alone).

Some Special Considerations when Viewing Autism Through the Eyes of Siblings

- The areas of deficit associated with autism have an impact upon the development of relationships with others.
  - Communication
  - Social relatedness
  - Social skills/play skills
  - Appropriate behavior
- These areas of deficit can impact the nature, quality and frequency of sibling interactions.

Some More Special Considerations

- Siblings have a limited ability to advocate on their own behalf and to articulate and address their needs, as their parents can (and do).
- By virtue of their age, siblings can not readily request and access social support from others.
- Unfortunately, services and programs for siblings of children with special needs are not widely available and often take a back burner to services for children with autism, particularly under the current economic conditions.
The Sibling Relationship

What is Unique and Significant About the Sibling Relationship?
- Provides the very first peer relationship that we experience in our lives
- Represents the longest relationship in our lives typically outlasting parent-child and marital relationships
- Involves a vast amount of shared time, space, and resources

What is Unique and Significant About the Sibling Relationship?
- Presents tremendous opportunity for modeling and observational learning
- Presents many contexts in which to explore and develop intimacy, reciprocity, and conflict resolution skills

What Are Other Important Considerations When Viewing the Sibling Relationship?
- This important relationship changes over time as both siblings age:
  - nature of relationship
  - amount and type of interaction
  - sibling rivalry
  - concerns

What Are Other Important Considerations When Viewing the Sibling Relationship?
- In many families of children with autism, the developmental gap between the sibling and the child with special needs may actually widen over time.
- In some cases "birth order" may appear to flip as younger siblings assume the role of older siblings.
- This gap will likely change the nature and types of interactions as well.
Supporting Siblings of Children with Autism

Possible Sources of Stress for Siblings
- Behavioral excesses of the child with special needs
- Behavioral deficits of the child with special needs
- Environmental accommodations to address the needs of the child with the disability

Possible Sources of Stress for Siblings
- Behavioral excesses in parenting (i.e., acts of commission on the part of parents)
- Behavioral deficits in parenting (i.e., acts of omission on the part of parents)

Possible Sources of Stress for Siblings
- Peers’ comments and reactions
- Cognitive errors on the part of the sibling (e.g., overpersonalizing)
- Cognitive deficits/ limitations on the part of the sibling

Sibling Concerns May Fluctuate Over Time
- Issues, concerns, and questions may change as the child with special needs gets older.
- Issues, concerns, and questions may change as the sibling gets older.
- Siblings may feel confusion regarding their parents’ changing attitudes and perceptions.
- Siblings may feel confusion regarding their own changing attitudes and perceptions.

What are Some Potential Positive Effects?
- Increased tolerance for and exposure to differences
- Heightened compassion and empathy
- Opportunities to develop and practice nurturing behaviors
- Exposure to a myriad of professionals in the human services fields

What are Some Potential Positive Effects?
- Awareness of the positive role of social support
- Recognition of the potential contributions of mental health services
- Opportunity to witness parents’ advocacy efforts
- Acceptance and development of an appreciation that life is not always fair
- Increased appreciation that life is full of small joys and successes
Communication between Parents and Siblings

Beliefs that Serve as Roadblocks to Healthy Communication Between Parents and Siblings

- Actual quotes:
  - "What he doesn’t know won’t hurt him."
  - "I won’t talk about all this as I want to make her childhood as normal as possible."
  - "He won’t understand, he is just a child."
  - "I can only handle the ‘autism thing’ right now so I can’t go there with the ‘sibling thing’ too."

Other Beliefs that Serve as Roadblocks to Healthy Communication Between Parents and Siblings

- Actual quotes:
  - "I’ll wait till she brings it up and then we talk about it."
  - "Since she’s not talking about it then no news must be good news."
  - "They seem to get along just fine, I do not want to mess with that."

Four Important Considerations Regarding Parent-Sibling Communication

#1 A relationship MUST be nurtured and not taken for granted.

#2 Good communication skills require practice.

#3 Practice involves discussing both positive and negative matters, comfortable and uncomfortable topics, easy and challenging discussions

#4 Do not think of having “the big talk” about autism or other disability, rather think about it a series of tiny conversations.

Some General Communication Strategies

- Describe, narrate, and explain behaviors commonly demonstrated by the child with autism.
- Discuss and clarify feelings that occur frequently.
- Invite sibling to share feelings.
- Model words to help the sibling develop a more descriptive and precise “emotion” vocabulary.
- Engage in relaxed and frequent dialogue about the child with special needs (if appropriate).

More General Communication Strategies

- Monitor your nonverbal behavior and facial expressions.
- An occasional comment regarding your own frustration and confusion may help the sibling appreciate that you understand.
- Answer questions directly and honestly.
- Admit when you can’t answer what the sibling has asked.
**Even More General Communication Strategies**
- Once the conversation is finished, praise the sibling for bringing up issue and discussing it with you.
- Consider having the sibling paraphrase what you communicated to him or her (this will give you important feedback as a communicator).
- Encourage the sibling to ask other questions in future.
- Provide many diverse outlets for siblings to bring up questions or concerns.

**Discussing Autism with Siblings**
- Always use language that is understandable to the sibling.
- Compare autism to other disabilities that effect various aspects of an individual's functioning:
  - Thinking
  - Talking
  - Moving about
  - Getting along with others
  - Seeing, Hearing

**Discussing Autism with Siblings**
- Highlight:
  - Major parts of the body impacted (e.g., the brain)
  - Functional impact of the disability
  - Comparisons of accommodations provided for other disabilities
  - Consider exercises and/or discussion designed to increase sensitivity and awareness

**Discussing Autism with Siblings**
- Discuss similarities and differences between special education and regular education.
- Discuss unique aspects of special education and the role it plays within the educational program:
  - Class size
  - IEP's/Progress notes
  - Purpose of inclusion
  - Curriculum
  - Presence of Aides
  - Extended School Year Services
  - Related Services

**Discussing Autism with Siblings**
- Help the sibling become familiar with medical and professional terms and their definitions as appropriate for age and level of understanding:
  - Autism
  - Echolalia
  - FBA
  - IEP
  - PDDNOS

**Discussions about Autism**
- Individualize discussion based on characteristics of YOUR child. Let siblings know that children with disabilities are not the same AND that all children with autism are not the same.
- Don’t focus solely on deficits. Balance discussion with what the child with autism CAN DO
- …………………and HAS ACCOMPLISHED.
- Help the sibling appreciate that everyone has strengths and weaknesses.
- Support the sibling in recognizing his or her own strengths and weaknesses.
Supporting Siblings of Children with Autism

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August 1, 2012

Some Special Considerations Surrounding Communication

- The cause or course of autism may not be relevant to younger siblings.
- Some siblings may need reassurance that the disability is not contagious and that the child with autism is not unhealthy or medically fragile.
- Some siblings may need reassurance they are not responsible for the disability.
- Make optimistic statements about current and future research and treatment.

Some "Hands-On" Strategies to Target Knowledge and Familiarity

- Consider a field trip to the child with special needs’ classroom or school.
- If it is not disruptive, provide sibling with the opportunity to observe the child participating in instruction or other classroom activities.
- Consider involvement in home-based intervention.

More "Hands-On" Strategies to Target Knowledge and Familiarity

- Give sibling an opportunity to speak with teacher/service providers and ask questions.
- Give siblings an opportunity to write a letter to the child’s teacher/service providers.
- Give siblings an opportunity to “interview” a service provider.
- Discuss a joint method of finding answers to difficult questions (e.g., going to library, looking up something online).

Self Concept and the Sibling

Optimal "Self-Concept" is Multilayered:

What Specific and Diverse Areas does it Involve?

- Regarding oneself highly
- Feeling loved
- Feelings of belonging and fitting in with the family
- Feelings of belonging and fitting in with a peer group
- Adequate self-confidence
- Comfort with one’s uniqueness
- Making good choices
- Willingness to try new things and novel experiences

Parental Strategies for Enhancing Self-Concept

- Siblings are bombarded by dialogue that incorporates the term “special.” Let the sibling that he or she is special too.
- Provide opportunities for sibling to explore and develop individual interests.
- Recognize that siblings may not share your interest in being a strong autism advocate....and that is OK!
Parental Strategies for Enhancing Self-Concept

- Avoid comparing the sibling to the child with the disability.
- Be careful not to expect too much from the sibling. Siblings may be at risk for becoming overachievers in an effort to overcompensate.
- Limit care duties for the child with autism. Siblings may be at risk for becoming “parentified.”

Parental Strategies for Enhancing Self-Concept

- Avoid overemphasizing the negative. Remember that kids aren’t bad, behaviors are bad.
- Think about “functions” of behavior problems. What may the sibling be trying to communicate? If the sibling was more articulate, what may he/she say instead?

Providing Positive Feedback to Siblings

- Provide feedback for both existing competencies as well as emerging competencies.
- Siblings witness children with autism receiving tremendous amounts of positive reinforcement. It can seem unfair to the sibling.
- Individualize your positive feedback based on the sibling’s wants, needs, and interests.

Providing Positive Feedback to Siblings

- All children need positive feedback and it can come in different forms.
  - Behavior-specific praise
  - General praise (unconditional)
  - Catching the sibling being good
  - Incidental opportunities to convey your appreciation and love
  - Extra efforts to acknowledge their achievements
  - Public efforts to acknowledge their achievements

Managing Troubling Sibling Interactions: Learning to be ( Appropriately ) Assertive

- Determine the basis for sibling conflict.
- Siblings may need to learn some conflict resolution or advocacy skills:
  - Saying “No” when being physically harmed or basic rights are being infringed upon.
  - Having an “escape plan” when serious behaviors emerge and using it when needed.
  - Obtaining parents’ attention quickly for prompt resolution of conflicts.
  - Refraining from disciplining the child with autism
Managing Troubling Sibling Interactions:
**Handling Aggression Proactively**

- Teach siblings to "Play Detective" which could involve asking themselves the following questions:
  - Was there anything I did that may triggered the problem?
  - Was there anything I said that may have triggered the problem?
  - What could I do differently the next time?
  - What could I say differently the next time?
- Dialogue addressing the above questions should be framed in a positive, forward thinking, and non-accusatory manner.
- This dialogue can occur well after the challenging situation occurred, particularly for recurring situations.

Managing Troubling Sibling Interactions:
**Handling Problems Proactively**

- "Catch BOTH children being good"
- Identify and teach replacement behaviors (desired behaviors that serve the same purpose as the undesired behaviors)
- Reinforce *prosocial* interactions on a very, very frequent basis.

Siblings’ Interactions with their Peers

- Validate and normalize feelings of embarrassment or other discomfort.
- Keep your eye out for difficulties arising from challenging peer interactions.
- Support the sibling in dealing with difficult interactions by talking about them and empathizing.
- Offer specific suggestions on how sibling can explain autism to his/her friends.

Managing Troubling Interactions with Peers: Assuming a Role

- Share your own experiences receiving and managing hurtful comments by friends, family, and members of the community (as appropriate).

Managing Troubling Interactions with Peers:
**A Cognitive-Behavioral Perspective**

- Help the sibling recognize the relationship between thoughts and feelings (i.e., "how I think about things effects how I feel").
- Help siblings resist tendency to say to themselves "My friend made he feel bad." Rather, friends can not MAKE you feel a certain way.
- Help the sibling change self-talk (i.e., "I can learn to say positive things to myself when these situations happen.")
Managing Troubling Interactions with Peers: A Cognitive-Behavioral Perspective

- Help the sibling recognize the relationship between their behavior and their thoughts/feelings (i.e., "If I talk to my brother in the right way, we can have a lot of fun together").

- Help siblings factor in the importance of their relationship with the peer with whom they are having difficulties when deciding how best to intervene:
  - is it a friend, best friend, classmate, neighbor, unfamiliar peer?
  - if not important, they may want to ignore the remarks.
  - if important, they may want to explain, be assertive, model a better response, discuss their feelings, or clarify expectations.

Some Additional Strategies for Managing Troubling Peer Interactions

- Discuss how sibling may approach a variety of difficult peer issues (e.g., legitimate questions, taunts).

- Choose issues that are relevant to the sibling.

- Role-play if possible. Practice broadly and realistically to enhance generalization to naturally occurring situations.

- Follow up and provide positive and corrective feedback.

Balanced Parenting

Achieving More Balanced Parenting: Providing Attention to the Sibling

- Recognize your limits. You are only human!

- Strive for quality attention versus quantity attention.

- Show the sibling you are willing to make time for him or her.

- If you are very busy, try your best to get back to the sibling.

- Acknowledge the sibling’s patience in waiting for your availability.

- Identify times / activities / events that are particularly reinforcing to the sibling. This is not always an easy task.

- Have structured time for the sibling:
  - Take special time for you and the sib only, even if it means getting a sitter.
  - Make a standing appointment to spend time with the sibling.
  - Get involved with another family. This can help you stick to a routine.
Achieving More Balanced Parenting:

**Becoming "More Available"**

- Sometimes parents aren't good listeners. Some tips to improve your "listening" skills include remembering to:
  - Stop thinking.
  - Stop talking.
  - Stop interrupting.
  - Give the sibling your complete and full attention.
  - Listen to understand not to respond.

- Treat what the sibling says as important. Let your face and body language convey this.
- Take time to apologize to the sibling if you do or say something that hurts his/her feelings.

**Getting Organized**

- Schedule well
- Prioritize
- Solicit assistance from your partner or other family members
  - Ask for help !!!
  - Work collaboratively on chores and child-care so that neither partner becomes overwhelmed

- Take time to care for yourself. Let sibling know it is OK for them to do the same.
- Remember how much of a role model you are.
- Explore and nurture your own interests.
- Avoid comparing yourself or your family to others.
- Give yourself credit for all that you do!
Achieving More Balanced Parenting: Do not forget about YOU!
- Do not neglect your other relationships.
- Invest in new relationships.

siblings and home-based behavioral intervention

potential issues more specifically associated with home-based aba intervention
- Siblings may be jealous of the level of attention provided by adults who come into the home.
- Siblings may be jealous of the amount of positive reinforcement provided to the child with autism.
- As we discussed, siblings may resent the discrepancy between how parents react to their:
  - Accomplishments and achievement versus those of child with autism
  - Behavioral incidents versus the transgressions of the child with autism

potential issues associated with home-based behavioral intervention
- Siblings may not be able to appreciate the importance or appropriateness of home-based intervention.
- Given the space and materials allocated to the ABA program, the sibling may be prohibited from playing in certain areas of the house or with certain toys.
- The need for structure and minimal distraction may pose even more restrictions on the siblings’ capacity to have friends over.

potential issues associated with home-based behavioral intervention
- Siblings may be concerned and/or upset by directly witnessing escape-motivated behavior and noncompliance.
- Siblings may believe that interventions (such as ABA) may be harmful to the child with autism.

siblings and home-based intervention: how may sibling involvement benefit the sibling?
- The mystique surrounding autism and the unique needs of children with autism may be lessened for the sibling as a function of involvement.
- Participation may reduce some of the concerns or misconceptions that may be brought about by the intensity and intrusiveness of a home-based program.
- Through formal and informal observation, siblings can acquire skills that may help them interact more successfully with a brother or sister with autism.
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Siblings and Home-based Intervention:
Let’s get specific

- The sibling can help the child with autism learn new skills by being a recipient of initiations by the child with autism
- The sibling can help the child with autism learn new skills by modeling a variety of desired responses
- The sibling can sit in on a session and create opportunities for dyadic instruction that later bridge into small group instruction
- The sibling can help the child with autism learn and practice turn-taking skills
- The sibling can help create larger group-based teaching opportunities to practice certain skills
- The sibling can target newly acquired skills by directly running programs

Sibling Training

What is the Published in the Area of Sibling Training?

- Researchers have typically highlighted the role of siblings as potential “teachers” of skills deemed to be important to the child with special needs.
  - Teachers of academic skills (e.g., Schreibman, O’Neill, & Koegel, 1983)
  - Teachers of self-care skills (e.g., Lobato & Tlaker, 1985)
  - Teachers of physical mobility (e.g., Craft, Lakin, Oppliger, Clancy, & Vanderlinden, 1990)
  - Teachers of communication (e.g., Bennett, 1973)
  - Teachers of domestic skills (e.g., Swenson-Pierco, Kohl, & Egel, 1987)

Sibling Training Research

- The feasibility of siblings as intervention agents for play skills has been supported by a number of investigators.
  - Celiberti & Harris, 1993
  - Coe, Matson, Craigie, & Gossen, 1991
  - James & Egel, 1986
  - Powell, Salzberg, Rule, Levy, & Itzkowitz, 1983
  - Reagon, Higbee, & Endicott, 2006

Improving Play Interactions Between Siblings: Implications for Parent Involvement

- Assess the sibling’s interest sensitively. “Forcing” greater involvement may only lead to resentment on the part of the sibling.
- Re-assess the sibling’s interest frequently.
- Assume an active role that involves careful observation, coaching, modeling and discussion.

Improving Play Interactions Between Siblings: Implications for Parent Involvement

- The sibling may not already be established as a reinforcer. Take this into consideration.
- Create situations:
  - That are time limited, yet frequent
  - Where both siblings find the play activity reinforcing
  - Where both siblings perceive each other in a positive light
  - That end on a positive note…do not be greedy
Improving Play Interactions Between Siblings: Implications for Parent Involvement

- Recognize that if you want positive interactions to increase in frequency and duration, then you must reinforce them.
- Be aware that in those cases where positive interactions between siblings are infrequent, siblings will benefit from a generous schedule of reinforcement for any and all efforts to learn new skills.

What Can Be Learned by Observing Existing Play?

- View your observation of the child’s isolate play as an opportunity to become familiar with:
  - the child’s limits
  - the level and nature of child’s play-related language
  - the child’s skills
  - the child’s preferences
  - and the child’s capabilities

  The information and insights garnered from such observations would be very helpful to share with siblings as well.

What Can Be Learned by Observing Existing Play?

- View parallel play as an opportunity for the children to become accustomed to each other (e.g., sharing time, space, and resources).
  - This serves as a building block for the development of cooperative play.

What Can Be Learned by Observing Existing Play?

- View cooperative play as an opportunity:
  - to observe existing patterns of interaction
  - to teach the sibling strategies to interact
  - to provide feedback to the sibling
  - AND for the child with autism to be reinforced for participation

Sibling Training: Broad Strategies that May Enhance Overall Interactions

- Making eye contact
- Speaking loud and clear
- If necessary, using the child’s name to promote attention, pausing before speaking further
- Being enthusiastic
- Giving the child adequate time to respond
- Using language that is understandable to child with autism
- Using praise as is appropriate
Sibling Training: Behaviors that Should Be Discouraged/Redirected

- Repeating requests over and over
- Providing excessive or abrupt physical prompting
- Overusing the child’s name at the beginning of interactions

Sibling Training: Behaviors that Should Be Discouraged/Redirected

- Requesting a response not in the child’s repertoire
- Ignoring child’s interests or initiations
- Assuming a level of interaction that is more appropriate for parents (rather than for siblings)

Specifying Behaviors that MAY Enhance Sibling Interactions During Play

| .....Regarding the Sibling and Child with Autism |    |
| Behaviors I would like to see MORE of | Behaviors I would like to see the sibling START doing |
| Behaviors I would like to see LESS of | Behaviors I would like to see the sibling STOP doing |

Sibling Training: Specific Behavioral Targets to Improve Play Interactions

- Generating appropriate play-related directives
- Delivering play-related directives
- Providing praise during play
- Providing prompts during play
- Providing feedback during play
- Using incidental teaching during play to elaborate upon child’s initiations

Sibling Training: Scheduling Issues

- Schedule times that do not conflict with the sibling’s highly reinforcing activities (and homework completion)
- Have the sibling participate in decision about which times to practice
- Plan on a high frequency of training session to address skills
- Have session brief in duration to minimize frustration, fatigue, and boredom

Sibling Training: Training Suggestions to Promote Success

- Preview objectives of each session to help orient sibling to your training goals
- Observe sibling play and note areas for remediation
- Collect some data and maintain simple notes to track progress
**Sibling Training: Training Suggestions to Promote Success**

- At the end of the session, review your feedback noting both areas of strength and areas in need of improvement.
- Again at the beginning of subsequent session, reiterate feedback from the previous session.

**Sibling Training: Other Training Considerations**

- In many cases, the child with autism may not be adequately compliant and cooperative. Therefore, sibling may benefit from role play activities separate from the child with autism in which:
  - an adult can take on the role of the child with autism
  - specific skills can be isolated
  - repetition can be used to enhance acquisition and fluency

**Sibling Support Groups**

**Sibling Support Groups: Common Objectives**

- To explore what it is like to be the brother or sister of a special needs sibling
- To discuss similarities and differences between normal sibling relationships and special sibling relationships
- To better understand the diverse and confusing emotions that siblings often experience when having a brother or sister with autism

**Sibling Support Groups: Common Objectives**

- To develop relationships and supports with similar others
- To help siblings understand that each of us have strengths and weaknesses
- To help siblings generate coping alternatives to difficult situations commonly experienced (e.g. peer or family conflicts)
Additional Objectives of Sibling Support Groups

- To increase siblings’ understanding of disabilities, and provide them with information about their brother or sister’s specific disability
- To facilitate communication with parents, relatives, and peers
- To help strike a balance between being the sibling of a child with special needs versus being an individual who just so happens to have a special needs sibling

Sibling Groups: What may be some advantages?

- May be less threatening than one on one intervention
- Is cost effective
- Offers emotional support to siblings
- Provides opportunities for peer modeling
- Involves exposure to issues and strategies that may become more relevant in the future

Sibling Groups: What are some potential disadvantages?

- Certain group members may be troubled by the myths and beliefs about sensitive issues (e.g., recovery) brought up by members of the group
- The group may vary widely with respect to age and level of participation
- Groups benefits may not directly impact upon parental behavior

Sibling Groups: What are some potential disadvantages?

- Insufficient duration for some children who may be confronting a wide range of issues
- May not be robust enough to allow for skill acquisition
- Benefits may not generalize or maintain improvement over time

Sibling Groups: Diverse Time Frames

- There are a variety of formats for groups which include but are not limited to:
  - Meeting weekly or monthly on an ongoing basis
  - Meeting weekly for a set period of time (e.g., 3 months)
  - Meeting monthly for a set period of time (e.g., school year)
  - Meeting every evening for a set period of time (e.g., 1 week)
Sibling Groups: Some Possible Topics
- Sibling relationships
- Relationships with parents
- Relationships with peers
- Nature of disabilities with an emphasis on autism/PDD
- Educational accommodations
- Self-esteem
- Self-identity and individuality

Sibling Groups: More Possible Topics
- Identifying and accessing social support
- Empowering siblings/Assertiveness
- Stress management
- Anger and its expression
- Concerns about the future

Sibling Groups: Some Possible Techniques
- Role-playing, Drama and puppet activities to explore themes and practice skills
- Art activities
- Games
- Group discussion

Sibling Groups: Some Possible Techniques
- Sensitivity training to foster empathy
- Relaxation training
- Conflict resolution training
- Education regarding characteristics, onset, and course
  - Most group leaders will select techniques based on age and make up of the group

Sibling Groups: Ideas for Getting Started
- Contact school or other service provider to see if there are existing groups or plans to have one
- Request that the school/agency assess interest
- Encourage school to identify a qualifies professional (e.g., a social worker or psychologist) who can wither run groups or provide professional supervision to group leaders
- Collect books and articles to serve as resources

Sibling Groups: Ideas for Getting Started
- Consult with others who provide sibling services
- Decide schedule and time frame (e.g., number and duration of sessions), ages to be served, number of group leaders
- Determine format of group, goals and objectives of group, and orientation of group (e.g., social, psychoeducational, combination of the two)
- Gather materials
Sibling Groups:

**Alternative Types of Sibling Contact (in addition to or in lieu of sibling support group)**

- Periodic days set aside for social contact between siblings (e.g., Sibling Appreciation Day)
- Sibling visit days to child’s school (e.g., Meet the Teacher Day”)
- Sibling pen pal opportunities
- Internet pal opportunities

**Possible Warning Signs that a Sibling may be Struggling**

- Chronic or unprovoked aggression
- Highly conflictual or angry relationship with child with autism
- Does not want to bring friends home
- Dramatic change in school performance
- Isolation from family and/or peers
- Excessive defiance
- Excessive moodiness, irritability, tearfulness

**More Possible Warning Signs...**

- Sudden lack of interest in previously enjoyed activities
- Persistent pessimism about the future
- Frequent self-blaming statements
- Comments about hurting oneself or others
- Excessive anxiety
- Sudden onset and continuing duration of bed-wetting after period of control

**Indications that Individual Therapy May be Warranted**

- The sibling demonstrates:
  - excessive anxiety
  - unusual discomfort being in a group
  - depressed feelings that persist for several weeks
  - sudden and persistent withdrawal
  - acting out behavior
  - extreme forms of attention seeking behavior

**Other Indications...**

- The sibling is uncomfortable about expressing concerns to his or her parents.
- The sibling has issues and concerns that go beyond those related to having a brother or sister with autism.
- The sibling asks to speak to someone.
Important Therapist Characteristics

- Past experience with sibling-related issues
- Understanding of the unique challenges associated with autism
- Experience with issues related to sibling and family relationships
- Willingness to share strategies with parents to promote generalization of therapy gains
- Willingness to speak with the sibling’s teacher (if needed)

Other Considerations

- Sibling’s comfort level with the therapist
- Availability or referral to a adjunct support group for siblings
- Availability and proximity

Is Family Therapy Warranted?

- Is the sibling
  - uncomfortable with disparity in parental attention?
  - resentful of extra responsibilities?
  - withdrawn from family?
- Does sibling have considerable conflict with one or both parents?
- Is there little communication with either or both parents?
- Do other family issues exist (e.g., divorce, step-family concerns, a change in residence, chronic illness) that may compound matters?