



# Brothers and sisters

The response of your other children will vary according to their age and personality. It may include a wide range of behaviours including:

- Embarrassment
- Protectiveness and nurturing
- Jealousy
- Anger at their parents or sibling
- Withdrawal from family life
- Treat their sibling as any other

Children at certain ages may exhibit attention-seeking behaviour as they notice that their brother or sister with a disability seems to get all the attention. Other ones may feel the burden of expectation, real or imagined, that they need to look after their brother or sister at the expense of meeting their own needs. This can trigger a feeling of further loss for them in this situation.

Some children just accept the situation and are upset when others don't treat their brother or sister as they do.

Our other children interact with him well. They act like normal brothers and sisters. There was a stage in development where he and the other children were on the same mental level and became closer. I call this stage 'twins', because they interacted really well. It is a trying time though, because the sibling eventually grows out of this stage and... [moves on] without them.

I think my second daughter was angry at one stage. 'Why did I have her?' They didn't understand why we had to have another baby after ten years. Which didn't happen that way... when she came, she came. That was one thing I couldn't explain to them, 'Why couldn't you do something about it and not let it happen?' But I think now she has her own personality, and she has her own place, and I cannot do without her and I think they think the same. They're trying to help.

She is queen bee [amongst our other children]. She is the one that rules the roost... she is a lovely little girl with a lovely personality. She is very social, has a moderate physical and intellectual disability, but she steals the show and steals people's hearts. She is a great trier and tries to keep up with the pack. That in itself is wonderful to see. They really dote on her and fight to be with. As they get older it may change a little bit.

I haven't really had to really explain the disability to my other children. They just accept their little sister. They laugh at her when she does funny things. She is not naughty, but cheeky. They realise, and help with her daily routine. They realise that she is disabled physically, but that doesn't stop them playing with her... and making her part of the big family.

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The only negativity is when other people don't accept her as they do. They get upset. It happened once when they were at a camp. A girl made a comment like, 'What's up with her? Why is she like that?'... They turned around and said, 'She's fine. What's wrong with you?'

They are good like that, I think also being part of a bigger family... It's like anything though. We have chores in the house like the dishwasher and feeding the rabbit. Sometimes it's, 'Who is going to help her get dressed?' It becomes, 'Oh, I did it last time!' So it's not all sort of rosy, but they are all accepting of where she is at.

He's good with the other children. Intellectually he is OK, which is a big bonus. He can communicate, which is unreal.

His younger brother body slams him. He is really rough with him, but he loves it and it has gotten him going a bit more.

For his older brother, it was very hard... He changed a lot... He became really quiet and withdrawn. Having another younger brother has helped him heal as well I think.

[The girls get along] great. They fight just like normal. She is normal. The only thing with her is she can't walk. She is bright and pretty and I think that helps a lot.

But no, her sisters, they love her. I think we took advantage of having three girls... all close in age. My middle one is just a year older. She is just a gorgeous girl. She loves her and mothers her. She fights with her and is really bossy with her as well. She is very lucky. My middle daughter said to me once, 'Don't worry Mum. When you get old she can always come and live with me'. Which is such a lovely thing to say.

Our other children came later and have grown up with him. They are basically beyond any disabilities. One questioned it about a year ago. 'Why does he walk like this?' He would try to mimic him, but they just play like any brothers... They know the terms, like brace and cerebral palsy. They hear that all the time... it's just a normal thing for them really.

## Tips from Siblings Australia:

(Note – "siblings" refers to the brothers and sisters of the child with a disability)

- Provide siblings with information about the disability
- Acknowledge the sibling's feelings – LISTEN
- Include siblings in family discussions
- Spend one-on-one time with siblings
- Watch for behaviour that might indicate stress
- Acknowledge their contributions - help them to feel competent - but avoid too much responsibility
- Celebrate their achievements
- Encourage 'normal' play between siblings
- Help siblings deal with other's reactions (the book 'Facing the Crowd' by Fullwood and Cronin is very good)

More tips and useful information can be found at the Siblings Australia website at [www.siblingsaustralia.org.au](http://www.siblingsaustralia.org.au)