Supporting Siblings During COVID-19

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Agenda

• Introductions
  • Michelle Gorenstein, PsyD
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• Why Focus on Siblings?

• Strategies to Support Siblings

• A Siblings Perspective

• Question and Answer
Why Focus on Siblings?

• Family dynamics have changed over the past 3 months
• Siblings of children with a disability have needs too
• Research has shown that when a typically developing child helps with the education of his or her sibling with a disability, it benefits both individuals
• On the other hand, over parentifying a typically developing child can lead to problems
Parenting Strategies

- Validate your child’s experiences and feelings
- Carve out special one on one time with each child
- Allow your child private “safe” space when needed
- Set equal expectations of all children as best you can, with regards to chores and behavior.
- Engage in shared activities as a family
- Provide direct and specific positive praise
- Don’t pathologize normal sibling rivalry
Sibling Strategies

• Connect with other siblings of children with disabilities
• Practice self care
  • Engage in activities you enjoy daily
  • Maintain social connections
  • Practice gratitude
General Resources

- https://researchautism.org/how-we-help/families/sibling-support/
A Message about COVID-19 and Community

Dear Friends,

Isolation is a familiar feeling and unfortunate reality for many siblings of people with special developmental, health and mental health concerns.

In her book, “A Difference in the Family,” Helen Featherstone, the mother of a child significantly impacted by disabilities, recognizes the isolation of siblings.

“In dealing with the wider world of friends, classmates and teachers, “she writes, typically developing siblings “can feel painfully different.”

Today, in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic, many of us feel isolated from our friends, extended family members, colleagues and communities. We feel the loss of the people, places, and routines that filled our daily lives. We are challenged to find new ways to learn, work, connect and play in an unpredictable environment.

From Isolation to Community

Our mission at the Sibling Support Project remains the same as when Dan Moen founded the program in 1990. To provide brothers and sisters of people with disabilities opportunities for information, support, and connection with each other.

Today, as a proud program of Autism Speaks, we support siblings through more than 100 SiteShop across the U.S. and in 16 countries around the world. We publish books and articles, facilitate online groups for teens and adults, and promote understanding of siblings and how to support them through podcasts, webinars, workshops and trainings.

At the heart of our work is the belief that siblings are special, too, and the knowledge that we are better together.

Redefining Together

The global COVID-19 pandemic has changed all of us to redefine – and find new ways of – being together.

Remote Sibshop Activity Ideas

The following is a list of activities and ideas to support siblings remotely. The list was generated during a March 27th Zoom call with 71 Sibshop facilitators from across the United States, and from other countries around the world. We expect this list to grow if you facilitate a registered Sibshop and would like to add your idea to this list, please send them to siblingsupport.org.

Zoom/Google Hangouts/Virtual Meeting Ideas

- **Virtual Workshops**
  - **Zoom Workshops** – South Sound Parent to Parent (WA)
    - Two zoom sessions, one for kids 7-10, another for kids 11-16, will include art activities, games and discussions about how kids are coping in the current environment. Outreach to parents to gauge interest/availability via email.
  - **Virtual Sibshop on Google Hangouts** – San Francisco Initiative (CA)
    - Participants discussed ideas for upcoming virtual Zoom meetings and shared ideas and strategies. Participants brainstormed virtual activities for kids to do at home.

- **Cooking Activities**
  - Family Support Network of Greater Forthbay (NC)
    - Develop a recipe and have your Sibshop participants try it. Then share the results of your work.

- **Virtual Creativity**
  - Family Support Network of Greater Forthbay (NC)
    - Develop a craft and have your Sibshop participants try it. Then share the results of your work.

Virtual Sibshops
Weekly virtual workshops for all sibs of children with special needs!
Every week they will get the opportunity to:

- Practice guided mediation and gratitude exercises to help carry them through some really stressful times and maintain positivity
- Discussion activities to open up the floor for them to talk, vent, or just talk about some positive things to focus on
- Fun activities to bond and connect the sibs!

For more information:
- Call: 631-348-0959
- Email: info@breakthroughptli.com
- Visit: breakthroughptli.com/sibshop/

Where: The comfort of your home!
When: Every Friday 12-1pm

https://www.breakthroughptli.com/sibshop/
FREE VIRTUAL SIB EXERCISE SESSIONS
For the Siblings of all Special Needs Kids (no age limits)

This is a great way for them to:
★★ Interact in a fun safe environment!
★★ Get some of their energy out!
★★ Get them moving and into something that feels like a routine
★★ Give YOU as a parent a MUCH needed break!

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
- CALL: 631-348-0959
- EMAIL: INFO@BREAKTHROUGHPALI.COM
- VISIT: BREAKTHROUGHPALI.COM

Every Wednesday @
10:15-10:45am!
Contact us for the link to join

https://www.breakthroughptli.com/sibshop/
A Sibling’s Voice: Sophia Sermone

Questions & Answers

• Thank you for your attention and participation!
• Please write questions into chat feature and let us know of additional topics you would like covered
• For copies of slides, please email: audrey.rouhandeh@mssm.edu or bari.britvan@mssm.edu