

SIBLINGS



are special too

Information for parents

Parents are often concerned about how their other children are coping when they have a brother or sister who has Down's syndrome. Siblings have spoken about "*disturbed nights, disrupted outings, isolation and guilt*". Sometimes they love their brother or sister, sometimes they hate them. They jump to their defence if someone outside their family is negative about their brother or sister. They often have an incredible need to protect them. These are just some of the emotions that brothers and sisters of children with Down's syndrome can experience.

Siblings have a lot to offer their brother or sister who has Down's syndrome. They can give them the experience of a close relationship with someone near their own age. It is equally important that siblings should feel that they are individuals with special and individual needs of their own.

Siblings can teach those who are willing to listen and they can guide the actions of parents and professionals who want to help them.

Below are some issues that parents feel siblings may have to deal with:

- **Limited time and attention from parents.**
- **Why them and not me?**
- **They worry about bringing their friends home.**
- **Restrictions on family activities.**
- **Guilt about being angry with their brother or sister.**
- **Embarrassment about a brother or sister's behaviour in public.**
- **Teasing or bullying about a brother or sister.**
- **Protectiveness towards their brother or sister.**
- **Concerns about the future – who is going to look after their brother or sister?**



How can parents help siblings?

- Offer regular times spent with siblings, such as outings, weekend breaks where possible, just you and them.
- Attend those special events that siblings are participating in. It's also your special time to feel proud of them too.
- Encourage siblings to meet with others in a similar situation. Often your child won't talk to you about their feelings, fearing that they might upset or worry you. It is important for them to know that someone else their own age understands what they are going through.
- Encourage siblings to develop their own social life. It might be helpful to enquire about siblings' groups or young carers' groups that are run in your area.
- Help siblings to find easy ways of explaining to their friends about their brother or sister's special needs. Provide booklets that might help them explain.
- Don't expect siblings to always include the child with special needs in their play or activities.
- Promote a positive image of your child. Be aware of any negative comments made about your child with Down's syndrome at home, often without realising it.
- Encourage siblings to talk about any of their negative feelings, let them know that it's all right to be angry. You might find it helpful to let them know that as an adult you sometimes experience those feelings too.
- Talk to the staff at the school that the sibling attends. Alert them to any concerns that you may have, particularly in relation to bullying or comments from other children.
- Talk to siblings about how to handle unpleasant remarks from their peers.
- Talk to siblings about possible plans for their sister or brother's future and find out about what their views are.
- Older siblings may need you to discuss issues around sexuality, medication, alcohol and relationships that may affect their brother or sister. Their brother or sister who has Down's syndrome may wish to discuss these topics with their sibling rather than parents. Down's Syndrome Scotland can offer information on these topics.
- Older siblings may also want you to discuss any genetic implications that may affect them.



Siblings can often be identified as young carers in their own right, and therefore are entitled under the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 to be recognised for the care that they provide. They are therefore entitled to assessment of their needs too. If you wish your child to have an assessment, speak to your social worker if you have one. There are many young carers' projects across the country. They provide advice, information and support or leisure activities. It is also a place where young carers can share their experience with one another.

Down's Syndrome

SCOTLAND helping people realise their potential

Written by Karen Bain.

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For further information please contact:

Down's Syndrome Scotland
158/160 Balgreen Road
Edinburgh EH11 3AU
Tel 0131 313 4225
Email info@dsscotland.org.uk
Web www.dsscotland.org.uk