

Young Siblings of Individuals with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities

To date, there has been some research about young children (ages 0-18) who have siblings with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). The purpose of this document is to share highlights of research about this population.

Bottom line

 Young siblings have both positive and negative experiences with their brothers and sisters. They are more likely to assume roles as caregivers; however, they are usually not included in service plans.

Positive Experiences: Compared to siblings of individuals without disabilities, young siblings of individuals with disabilities are more likely to feel better about themselves. Long term, siblings of individuals with disabilities may exhibit more empathy and understanding toward individuals with disabilities.

Negative Experiences: The research about negative sibling experiences is mixed. Some studies find that siblings of individuals with (versus without) disabilities have increased behavior problems, anxiety, and/or depression. However, other studies find no difference in behavior problems, anxiety, or depression.

Sibling Relationship: In childhood, sibling relationships tend to be close and positive. As youth, siblings tend to spend a lot of time with their brothers and sisters with disabilities. Furthermore, siblings of individuals with (versus without) disabilities have been found to have warmer relationships. Regarding sibling conflict, however, the research is mixed. Compared to siblings of individuals without disabilities, some studies have shown that siblings have increased fights with their brothers/sisters with disabilities and other studies have found no differences with respect to sibling fights.

Caregiving Roles: Even in youth, siblings of individuals with disabilities have been found to take on more caregiving roles than siblings of individuals without disabilities. The effects of this increased caregiving are mixed. Some studies report that experiencing increased caregiving relates to developing a greater understanding of others. Other studies, however, report that increased caregiving can lead to increased anxiety and less time for siblings to spend with their own friends.

Involvement in Service Coordination: Unfortunately, many service plans do not include siblings. For example, young children with disabilities receive early intervention services. These services are outlined by family plans. The plans should include the parents, the individual with a disability, and siblings. Most family plans, however, do not address siblings. Another kind of service plan is a transition plan. While siblings will be heavily involved in future caregiving, most siblings are excluded from transition meetings.

References

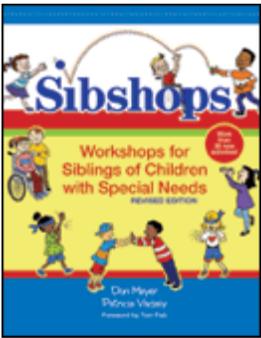
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Resources

✂ There are some resources available to meet the needs of young siblings. Here, we provide highlights of some of the resources available.

Sibshops

Sibshops (www.siblingsupport.org) is an international program for young siblings of individuals with disabilities. Lead by a sibling facilitator, Sibshops include activities, talking time, and usually a snack for the participants. While there has been little research about Sibshops, the existing studies show that Sibshops benefit young children. Benefits include: networking with other siblings, sharing common experiences, and learning more about disabilities.



Sibshops: Workshops for Siblings of Children with Special Needs is a guidebook for organizing and sibling support groups. Periodically, the Sibling Support Project offers two-day Sibshop Facilitator Training.

Language and behavioral Interventions

Young siblings engage in more caregiving roles than playmates with their brothers/sisters with I/DD. Furthermore, many individuals with I/DD have limited social skills and interactions. As such, interventions which both teach the sibling how to interact with their brothers/sisters and provide greater social opportunities for individuals with I/DD are of great interest (Trent, Kaiser, & Wolery, 2005). Increasingly, researchers are teaching siblings how to be appropriate play partners with their brother/sisters with I/DD. With appropriate training, siblings can be interventionists for their brothers/sisters with I/DD (Kim & Horn, 2010).

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