



## Supporting Siblings of Children with Autism

It is not easy being a sibling of a child with autism. However, sibling relationships can be beneficial for developing social skills. Children with autism do best when they have a sibling who plays with them, helps them learn social skills, prompts them to use language, and is involved in all aspects of their Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) program.

As a result, many families have high expectations for the typically developing siblings. These brothers and sisters need to understand that they play a very important role. Yet, a sibling's motivation and cooperation is only sustainable if parents provide them with confidence, self-esteem, independence, and support on their own journey to build a strong personal identity.

### Here are some tips to help siblings cope with a sister or brother who has autism:

**Talk about autism.** Be open and honest in explaining autism and how it affects their brother or sister. Children will certainly have questions which you should be prepared for and feel comfortable answering. Include them in discussions about the child's programs, classrooms, and special needs, and encourage their comments and suggestions.

**Show Praise and Gratitude.** Having a sibling with autism is challenging. Praise your children and reward them for helping out. Their sibling will always require their patience and contribution. Let them know you are thankful for their efforts.

**Focus on the Sibling.** Set aside some "alone time" for you and the sibling on a regular basis. This is time for them to be a kid, and for you to enjoy their company and interests. Make this time fun and special, and allow the child to express his or her unique personality. Siblings should experience their own childhoods and enjoy separate sleepovers, play dates, and extracurricular activities that explore their individual talents and interests.

**Communicate.** Devote some regular quiet time just for talking. Create an atmosphere where your children feel safe expressing their emotions. Let them know you hear them, and that you know it is hard having so much attention and effort go to their sibling. Remind them of things that are special about them and ask if there are things you have neglected to acknowledge.