



Purple Playas Puffy's Pointers

Ages: All



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SIBLING OF A SISTER WITH CHRONIC ILLNESS

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4Sibs

Ensuring Siblings Feel Important Too

Chronic illness is just that; chronic! It affects the whole family. Your other child/children who do not have a chronic illness may feel out of control, unimportant, overshadowed, jealous, scared, angry, and sad, among other emotions.

When learning to navigate a chronic illness, every member of the family may handle it in a different way. While moms and dads have their perspective of watching their child endure his or her disease, siblings see their brother or sister AND their parent(s) struggling. Often, the "healthy" children may try to be self-sufficient in hopes of taking pressure off of the parent(s), and some may act out in search for attention. Here are a few suggestions to help your non-chronically ill children navigate this journey and ensure that they are important too:



Talk about the illness at their pace. Ask the sibling(s) if they would like to hear how the doctor's appointment went that day and respect their answer. Ask if they have any questions about the illness or about their chronically ill brother or sister. Consider sharing resources and books to help with understanding. If the sibling does not want to speak about it, do not force it, just reassure you are available.



Ask the sibling(s) if they want to help their brother or sister. Find a way to fit the sibling into the "chronically ill agenda", so they do not feel left out. Here are some examples: teach the sibling(s) how to give injections, invite to attend medical appointments, allow to be the designated "helper" (i.e., with the band aid, ice pack or heat pack retriever), ask if they want to be the captain of a walk/run team for a nonprofit awareness event; etc. It is also alright if they don't want to help.



Find ways to have one-on-one/special time with the sibling(s). While a day off school to go to a doctor's appointment or therapy is not exactly "a day off", a sibling may see it as special time that the chronically ill child is getting with one or both parents. Make an effort to have one-on-one/special time with the sibling(s), such as leaving school early to go out for ice cream or planning a special weekend activity.



Ensure the expectations for every child are equitable and make sure the sibling and the child with chronic illness understand the expectations. Whether it be chores, grades, following rules, or anything else, if the expectations are different for the chronically ill child, explain why that is the case. For example, if your chronically ill child does not get reprimanded for getting a low grade on an assignment when your other child(ren)

do, explain why. They may not be able to draw the parallel on their own that their chronically ill brother or sister misses more school, and therefore, has a harder time grasping the material.



Be honest and validating. If sibling(s) ask you questions, be honest (age appropriate). If they “hate” the disease their brother or sister has, validate their feeling. Tell them that you wish they did not have to deal with it. Consider sharing your emotions too. Help all your children understand that you see it is not easy for them. Younger children may use challenging behavior because they don’t know how to express what they are feeling. Consider printing and using the “Feeling Wheels” on our website. It is much easier to point to an emotion picture, and it will promote understanding and discussion.



Notice the little things and celebrate the big things! In all the hustle and bustle of daily life, much becomes routine. There are certainly more routines and demands on a family dealing with chronic illness in a child. Remember to open your eyes to the little moments, tasks, and accomplishments that all your children do. Comment on both the simple kindnesses along with the big efforts and be specific with your appreciation and praise.

***We would love to hear about your siblings!
How do they help your family navigate life
with a chronically ill child?***



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