

Brothers and Sisters



On occasion the brothers and sisters of a child with a visual impairment or a child multi-disabled visually impaired provide a great amount of care and consequently are young carers. Young carers, under the age of 18 years, are provided with the right to their own personal assessment under the Carers (Recognition and Services) Act, usually the assessment is undertaken in conjunction with the annual review for the cared for person. The Children's Act 1989 stated the needs of the siblings, brothers and sisters of a cared for child, should not be overlooked and that the children within the family should be included in what is happening.

To ensure that siblings are included the National Blind Children's Society, promotes within its Family Weekends and recreational activities, day trips etc., throughout the year at different venues. Brothers and sisters are involved and we encourage siblings to feel part of what is going on.

Siblings' feelings about themselves in the family and community

All children are different, but all need to know they are loved and it can be difficult to explain that children's needs may be different.

In praising a visually impaired child's achievements, it can be difficult to maintain a balance when the sighted child might feel he has to achieve more in order to earn the same praise.

It can be very difficult to control other people's kindness when the visually impaired child is showered with gifts to the point of embarrassment. Toys can be passed on to other children in nurseries.

Finding family outings enjoyable for all the children can involve much planning and sometimes impossible.

Siblings need strategies to deal with teasing by other children.

Siblings will go through phases e.g., 11-12 year old embarrassment factor and periods of resentment. It is important to allow them the space to go through these phases.

Hospital visits and siblings' feelings about visual impairment/disability

Involving the family and the brothers and sisters of the child with a visual impairment with regard to hospital visits, will help to demystify the situation. Parents should avoid 'making secrets' around a child's condition and keeping such secrets from brothers and sisters. The National Blind Children's Society have produced a publication, 'A Day with Tom at the Eye Hospital', which provides an explanation of the people the child with a visual impairment are likely to meet at the hospital. If you would like a free copy of this booklet, please contact us.

If the ages of the visually impaired child and brother or sister are close, or if the visually impaired child is the eldest child, it can be more difficult to explain.

Some children may have difficulty talking about their feelings, perhaps because they were shielded and mystery surrounded their baby brother or sister's birth. This can make things particularly difficult if the cause of visual impairment is genetic and siblings have to undergo tests themselves.

It is important not to tell children more than they need to know. Parents should not be afraid to answer questions but need to be wary of where to draw the line.

Disclaimer: Information sheets have been produced to provide information and advice for the parents of visually impaired children. Changes may occur in theories and legislation, however, the information sheets have been written in good faith, as a general guidance tool. If you have any questions with regard to issues raised by the information sheet, please contact the National Blind Children's Society, National Family Support and Information Manager.