

Whatever Happens to the Brothers and Sisters of Children with Autism? The Good News...

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that those with mental or physical challenges have a capacity for growth and abilities that may transform the current view of them as liabilities into the increasingly accepted attitude that they may indeed become assets to society. All well and good.





- The "well child"
- Needs no special attention Physically and mentally capable to perform "normal life tasks"
- · Normal sibling relationships
- · Sibling relationships in a family with a child with autism



world of normal classmates and the other in their exceptional family." Featherstone, Helen, A Difference in the Family- Life with a Disabled Child: Basic Books, Inc. New York, 1972, p.146.

> there are a variety of styles of sibling relationships which are normal.





### Sibling Bond

ccess"- factor that creates emotional bond between children High access (strong sibling bond)-most likely to occur when children are close in age, of same gender, have shared many activities

Low access (subsequent weaker bond)- widely separated in age, have spent little time together,

bond does not mean a and are of different gender



### Early Childhood

- A good relationship at age 5 will be different at age 15
- Nevertheless, foundation for connection is laid down in early childhood





### Reaction of older child to birth

- You can no longer devote all your energies to older child
- . "This is my new wife."
- · Role of parents-crucial in this adjustment







### 3 to 4 years old : One of most important transitions in interactions of brothers and sisters happens



- By this age, children have skills that make them increasingly desirable companions for childhood play
- Skills include complex language, motor abilities, and social repertoire that make them attractive playmates for their older brother or

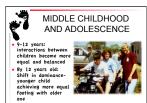
### 3-4 years old

- Young children who are closer in age are likely to experience more quarrels and tension than are children 4 or more years apart
- . However, they are more likely to form a close personal bond















## XXX

What happens to normal course of development when one of siblings has autism and is unable to respond in usual fashion to joy, play, and rough and tumble of childhood?



- Children of any age may begin to doubt self-worth and importance when parents seem preoccupied with sibling with autism
- Of course, these kinds of frustration are not unique to just a family with autism
   Important to recognize difference
  - Important to recognize difference between normal frustration and special impact of sibling



- Most siblings learn to handle experience, show no major ill effects
- Nevertheless, special demands are made of child
- If you understand these burdens, you may be able to ease them.

-Michele S.M., Shou J., 4 Smeaneau R.J. (1986). Shiling relationships of children with varietic, mentally retarded, and renhandicapped brothers and sisters. Journal of Aution and Developmental Disorders, 16, 1999-413.

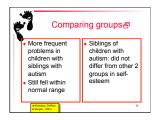


# More recently... Between ages of 6-15: mostly positive things to say about bother or sister



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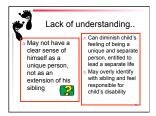








or resentment





### What to do...

- Combating ignorance and educating others is an important skill for sibling
- Ignorance about autism can breed fear, can damage relationship with sibling
- Child's age is an important factor



## In your eagerness to inform...

- Don't make mistake of imposing too much info at one time
- 2. Brief answers
- Often child will signal he is satisfied by changing subject: RESPECT THAT



























Will need parent's support in accepting full impact of his sibling's disability



What is challenging is helping teenager understand what autism means for self, her family, and her sibling

### Helping in organizations



Best Buddies Special Olympics ARC Autism Society

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Guy helping Kirk during ARC fishing tournament, 2006



Must be fully informed about behavior management, community resources, medical needs of sibling

## balancing act

- Promoting a Healthy Family Life:

  Humor and coping
- Limiting childcare responsibilities
   Being alone with parents
- •Issues of time and space
- Sincerely acknowledging sibling's
- accomplishments
  •Potentially embarrassing situations
- Treating siblings equally (fairly?)



