



SUPPORTING SIBLINGS THROUGH A SERIOUS MEDICAL CONDITION

Siblings of children with a serious medical condition need support.

Here are some commonly expressed worries, concerns, and feelings from siblings of all ages, and ideas for how to respond.

IF THE SIBLING EXPRESSES THE FEELING OF BEING LEFT OUT (OR) INVISIBLE...

- “It is true that I need to spend a lot of time caring for [name]. But I will always try to be available for you. When I can’t, [name] will pick you up from school, make dinner, etc. And we will find another time to be together.”
- “Would you like to help? You could play with [name] while I [activity]. Or help pick up toys. Or maybe you have your own ideas?”
- “Would you like to visit the hospital and see where we are spending so much time?”

IF THE SIBLING DISPLAYS SIGNS OF JEALOUSY, INCLUDING WISHING TO ALSO BE SICK...

- “I understand that this is very difficult for you. [I know that you don’t want to be sick, too.] [Perhaps I haven’t given you all the attention that you feel you want.] What can we do, together, to make you feel better about this situation we are in?”

IF THE SIBLING IS CONCERNED THAT THEY HAVE CAUSED THE ILLNESS...

- “[Name’s] illness just happened. Nothing you did or thought made it happen. Would you like to talk to a doctor who can explain this and answer any questions you have?”

IF THE SIBLING IS DISPLAYING SIGNS OF STRESS, WORKING OR TRYING TOO HARD TO BEHAVE OR ACHIEVE...

- “I see that you are trying very hard to be good at so many things. That is a lot of pressure to put on yourself. I think you are fine just as you are. Maybe you would like to talk to someone about how you are feeling. They could help you find ways to relax a little.”

IF THE SIBLING SEEMS WITHDRAWN AND UNINTERESTED IN BEING WITH FRIENDS...

- “I’ve noticed that you don’t play with [name] so much these days. I’m wondering what you are feeling, if you are feeling different from the other kids now. You are certainly going through some things that they aren’t.”
- “Can we think about how you can tell them about [sibling]? You may find that they miss you and want to know what’s happening.”
- “Let me ask if the doctors know other kids who you can talk to.”

IF THE SIBLING REPORTS INFORMATION THAT IS NOT ACCURATE OR IS TAKEN OUT OF CONTEXT...

- “Maybe you heard me talking on the phone about [subject]. There are a lot of conversations and a lot going on. The doctors put it all together to understand what is happening. We will know more when they do.”
- “Our friends are very concerned, but they don’t have the whole story. Is there something you would like to ask about?”

IF THE SIBLING TRIES TO CARE FOR AND PROTECT THE PARENT...

- “You are so kind and caring. I know that you want me not to be sad/stressed/etc. It’s okay to not feel great all the time. There are lots of good times too, and there always will be.”
- “The best thing you can do for me is to let me know how you are feeling. I love you and want to help you get through this too.”