



Navigating through... Special Education

The Other Kid

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Welcome to the sixth installment of Navigating through Special Education. In this month's article, I will present information related to SEPTA's Meeting, entitled "**The Other Kid: Sibling Support Workshop.**" It's very difficult when you have one child who has special needs and another child who can do most things kids their age can do without special help. They can talk, play, walk, and learn easily. These children, all too often, have their own difficulties adjusting to having a sibling with a disability. They often feel neglected or jealous that their sibling gets most of the attention. The good news is that there are many ways for you to help your child not feel like the "Other Kid."

Some feelings that the "Other Kid" may have toward his sibling include: feeling guilty when having fun and the sibling can't join in, feeling jealousy about the time and energy parents give to his sibling; feeling embarrassed to bring friends home to play; feeling scared, worried, angry or sad about his sibling; and feeling frustrated communicating with his sibling.

Special Needs can mean different things to the "Other Kid." When someone says that a child has special needs, it can mean that the child has difficulty walking, talking, or learning. Some siblings cannot see, hear or speak. Sometimes, children are born this way, while other times it is due to

an accident or illness. The “Other Kid” may be curious about why her sibling has trouble doing things that are easy for her to do. The “Other Kid” may look different from other kids or act in ways that are strange and scary.

The “Other Kid” may also feel very angry because she has a special needs sibling. She may feel mad at mom and dad because they give so much attention to the special needs sibling. Parents should talk to their “Other Kid” and confirm that she has every right to feel angry and teach her ways in to deal with such anger. Talking to someone she trusts is important. Buried angry feelings can grow, while talking about her feelings should make her feel “lighter and free.” The “Other Kid” may feel sad when she thinks about her sibling. Parents should reaffirm that it’s OK to feel sad. She doesn’t have to be brave and strong all the time. More importantly, conveying the message that it is normal to feel bad and even show emotions like crying is helpful. It’s also important to let your child know that it’s not their fault. To do this, parents may want to explain the reason why the sibling is different and has special needs. For example, parents can explain when a baby is growing inside their mother’s body, it goes through many changes. When the baby does not develop in the usual way, the baby will have special needs. Sometimes a child develops special needs because of an illness or an accident. Sometimes we don’t know why the child has special needs.

If you have an “Other Kid” who is young, he may be worried that he might “catch” his sibling’s disability. It’s important that parents explain that disabilities are not like a cold. You can’t “catch” a disability. Disabilities, including mental retardation, cerebral palsy, and autism are not caught by coughing, sneezing, or sharing toys. It’s important for the sibling to remember that disabilities often happen when the baby is growing inside their mother’s body and the brain does not develop in the usual way.

It can also be lonely if you’re the “Other Kid” in the family. With parents busy taking care of the sibling it may seem like the whole world revolves around the sibling. Parents may also be angry, sad, and busy or

tired since taking care of a special needs child is very hard work. The “Other Kid” may feel almost invisible or unimportant on a bad day. Sometimes, the “Other Kid” will misbehave just so his parents will notice him. Sometimes, when you are the “Other Kid” much is expected. Sometimes, he will feel the need to be a grown up or a “little adult” because he must do things like cook or fend for himself because he does not want to bother his parents.

The “Other Kid” should know that she’s not alone. She should know that there are thousands and thousands of kids all over the world who are just like her. Reading books or articles, and talking to others will help her understand their situation better.

As parents, I hope you will utilize the information above to help all of your children feel loved. Simple strategies can go a long way to help each of your children to thrive.

Suggested Reading/Web Site List for both Parents and the “Other Kid”

- The Other Kid by Lorraine Donlon
www.theotherkid.com
- Inclusion and the other kids
www.urbanschools.org
- Sibling Issues
www.nichcy.org/families_and_community/pages/sibling_issues.aspx
- Siblings of Children with Disabilities: An Interview with.....
www.parents.com
- Siblings with Disabilities-Living with Disabled Siblings
www.learningdisabilities.about.com/od/.../a/Disabled_siblin.htm