

# Siblings

As a parent, you will be greatly aware of how tough it can be to share a home with a child with ADHD. As well as being lively and exciting, it can be exhausting, frustrating, and sometimes emotionally draining. If you recognise these feelings, then your other children will as well. It is important to give them extra care and attention, helping them to cope with their brother's or sister's ADHD.

Siblings of children with ADHD often suffer as a result of a chaotic family life. Feelings of sadness and loss may occur due to missing out on the extra attention that your child with ADHD requires, treasured toys being broken, and family outings being cut short.

Children thrive in a safe and predictable family environment. Putting ADHD into the mix can destabilise the sense of security that children need.

Younger children may feel victimised by their older sibling with ADHD. They can be an easy target of volatile outbursts or aggression. Being bossed around can make young children feel powerless.

Older children sometimes feel a burden of responsibility to be their sibling's minder. Some children may feel a sense of pride from taking on this role. However, it is often the case that children miss out on their own care-free childhood.



There is a risk that children without ADHD will try to make themselves invisible so as not to burden their already stressed out parents. They may see themselves as less significant. Sometimes they might feel ignored and even unloved. If this happens, you might notice they start spending more time on their own, or become very quiet. This makes it difficult for them to express their own needs and have these met.

Alternatively, siblings without ADHD may mimic their brother's or sister's behaviour, or intentionally misbehave to get your attention.

Children often feel jealous and resentful towards the amount of extra support their siblings with ADHD need. The special rules or leniency can seem very unfair. Having these feelings can also lead to a sense of guilt.

When ADHD is carefully managed, family relationships will be much improved. Luckily, there are lots of things you can do to help minimise the disruption to your other children.

# Tips for supporting siblings

- 1 Educate the whole family about ADHD. If your children understand the reason behind hyperactive and impulsive behaviour, they will be more accepting and tolerant of it.
- 2 Hold family meetings to ensure that everyone has a say in how the family operates. Take turns to be the speaker.
- 3 Agree on one or two non-negotiable rules, such as 'sibling's bedrooms are out of bounds', and 'no hitting or kicking'. This applies to everyone.
- 4 Every day, try to spend 10 minutes with each of your children alone, just to talk about their day.
- 5 Once a month, plan a special activity for you and each child alone. You could go on a day out or just to the park.
- 6 Allow your children some quiet, uninterrupted time. You could arrange for your child with ADHD to go to a club or relative's home.
- 7 Allow older children to have a lock on their bedroom door.
- 8 If your children are getting on well together, acknowledge and praise it.
- 9 Beware mimicking. Try to only give your attention to good behaviours. If your child misbehaves, they should be ignored, rather than rewarded with your attention.

- 10 Bring as much routine into your home as possible. This way, everybody knows what to expect.
  
- 11 Sibling rivalry is normal, but bullying is never acceptable. Hitting and aggression is always a red light behaviour. A good way to recognise bullying is when one child feels powerless to stop it.
  
- 12 Make sure your children know that a brother or sister with ADHD is not their responsibility.
  
- 13 Children can feel a sense of belonging by being part of group activities outside the home. You could enrol them in cubs, brownies, sports teams or music clubs.
  
- 14 Don't set yourself up for failure. If you know that one child won't be able to cope with a whole day out, arrange for a family member to collect them after an hour to do a separate fun activity.