

Sibling support toddlers and preschoolers

Ages 2 years to 5 years

Regardless of their age, siblings of children with a life-changing injury or chronic health condition will also need your support and understanding.

What siblings need

Siblings need you to:

- Recognize and accept their emotions.
- Provide information about their sibling's diagnosis, or injury.
- Create a stable home environment with routines and boundaries.



As siblings grow, their needs and the type of support they require will change.

Cook Children's Sib2Sib Program™

This program offers siblings the opportunity to:

- Recognize their unique qualities and gifts.
- Have fun outside of their daily routines.
- Be supported by encouraging adults.
- Express their feelings about having chronically ill brothers or sisters.
- Build relationships with other siblings going through similar situations.

The Sibling Support Project

This is a resource for siblings of all ages.

<https://siblingssupport.org> or



To request support for siblings

Send us an email at:

sibprogram@cookchildrens.org or ask to speak with a child life specialist.

To talk to us about specific sibling concerns or needs:

- Request individual time for you or the brothers and sisters to meet with a child life specialist.
- If you are away from the hospital, we would be happy to talk with you over the phone.

Ask a member of your child's medical team to connect you with a child life specialist or call the Child Life department at 682-885-4048.

Books for siblings

"Just Because" by Rebecca Elliott. Ages 3 years or older.

"Sometimes" by Rebecca Elliott. Ages 5 years to 7 years.

"Hi, My Name is Jack" by Christina Beall-Sullivan". Ages 3 years to 12 years.

“Views from Our Shoes: Growing Up with a Brother or Sister with Special Needs”. By Donald Joseph Meyer ... Ages 9 to 12 years.

“The Sibling Slam Book: What It's Really Like To Have A Brother Or Sister With Special Needs” by Don Meyer. For Tweens and Teens

Common behaviors, feelings, and reactions

	Common feelings and reactions	How you can help
Separation from caregivers	<p>Not being able to be with their primary caregivers can be the biggest struggle for young children.</p> <p>Clinginess, irritability and more frequent temper tantrums are common.</p>	<p>As much as possible, maintain home routines and familiar caregivers.</p> <p>Ask your child life specialist for ideas on ways to stay connected</p>
Confusion	<p>Children at this age rely on what they immediately see and experience to understand the world.</p> <p>They often have misconceptions about the health condition or misunderstand medical jargon.</p>	<p>Give simple, concrete explanations about the sibling’s condition, particularly changes that the young child will see.</p> <p>Repeat this information as needed.</p>
Fear of punishment	<p>At this age, children are learning about good and bad behavior.</p> <p>They may be afraid they caused their sibling’s illness, disability or injury and that separation from the sibling or caregiver is a punishment.</p> <p>Even if this is not possible or makes no sense</p>	<p>Always reassure young children that nothing they did caused the illness, condition or injury, even if they have not voiced this worry out-loud.</p>
Jealousy and anger	<p>Young children may become upset about the extra attention and gifts the sibling receives.</p> <p>It may seem to them that the sibling is having more fun or the caregivers like them better.</p>	<p>Set aside a regular time for the well sibling to do something special with one or both parents.</p> <p>Help young children label their feelings of anger, jealousy and worry.</p> <p>Tell them it is normal to feel this way and help them find better ways to vent their anger.</p>
Over-identification	<p>Some children may be worried they are going to “catch” the same illness or condition as their sibling.</p> <p>Others may say “I’m sick too” in order to get the same amount of attention as their sibling appears to be getting.</p>	<p>Give simple, concrete explanations about the sibling’s condition and reassure your child.</p> <p>Maintain consistent, age-appropriate expectations for behavior for all siblings</p>
Over-protectiveness	<p>Some children may try to take on more responsibility, either “bossing” their siblings around or doing everything for their sibling as if they are another parent.</p>	<p>Maintain consistent, age-appropriate expectations for behavior for all siblings.</p>

Child Life

For contacts and locations visit:

[cookchildrens.org/patients-families/healthcare-team/child-life-specialists/](https://www.cookchildrens.org/patients-families/healthcare-team/child-life-specialists/) or



These instructions are only general guidelines. Your healthcare provider may give you special instructions. If you have questions or concerns, please call your healthcare provider.