

SIBLING SUPPORT PROJECT

By Thomas Saikaley, Nilani Thuraisingham,
Leah Tracey, Aviva Wang & Sydney Wasserman

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Sibling bonds are known to be among the most intensive and long-lasting interpersonal relationships individuals will have. This connection will often play a big role in the development of one's personality and identity. Siblings of children who have been diagnosed with a brain tumour often face unique challenges. This illness demands sacrifices, introduces new responsibilities and gives rise to stress. These factors impact the entire family's quality of life - particularly that of the sibling since they tend to be very close.

HOW TO APPROACH A CHILD WITH DIFFICULT NEWS

Speaking to a child about a sibling's diagnosis with a brain tumour can be a very difficult task, but it is necessary. Children learn by observation, thinking, and creating their own understanding of things going on around them. So, if children are not given the right information on a topic, such as their sibling's diagnosis of a brain tumour, it is possible that they will create their own, often incorrect, understanding and meaning of a situation. This can possibly do more harm than good for the child.

When explaining and teaching children, we must be explicit, truthful, and honest, as well as address their feelings when providing them with information. Below are some coping strategies:

Approach-oriented coping: address stressful events and emotions directly.
Avoidant-coping strategies: distractions & distancing oneself to relieve stress.

What effects will a brain tumour have on the siblings of affected children?

These are some of the things siblings of children with brain tumours may feel throughout the transition phase of the diagnosis.

It is important to understand that these feelings are normal and recognize how they can be impacted psychologically, physically and developmentally. Acknowledging the way these children are feeling and impacted is the first step to providing them with the proper support.

PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS

Anger	Fear of the same illness
Feeling ignored	Feeling unimportant
Impatience	Jealousy
Loneliness	Restlessness

Some coping strategies: Self-focusing, Distraction alone or in groups, Withdrawal (time out or escaping).

What effects will a brain tumour have on the siblings of affected children? (continued)

PHYSICAL EFFECTS

Eating Disorders

Some have poor appetite, others have the need to overeat

Sleeping Problems

Fatigue, insomnia, sleep disturbances, nightmares

Headaches

Involuntary urination

FAMILY EXPERIENCES

Effects on sibling bond, parent-child relationships & whole family interactions

Possible competition between siblings or positive sibling tie

Miss out on normal things in a sibling relationship like playing

Parent relationship: feelings of rejection, family conflicts, worried about being less attentive to siblings' needs

Sudden changes in family routines & lifestyle: less family involvement of healthy siblings, increased family closeness, feelings of protection and security

Some coping strategies: Communication & problem-solving discussions within the family.

What effects will a brain tumour have on the siblings of affected children? (continued)

EVERYDAY LIFE EXPERIENCES

Social isolation & withdrawal

More responsibilities to help parents (helps with maturation)

Difficulties in school: decreased performance, school phobia, desire to stay at home to be with ill sibling

Increased social skills: more communicative & cooperative, more emotional intensity & increased sensitivity (empathy, compassion and patience)

EXPERIENCES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SIBLING'S ILLNESS

Promotion of a caring sibling relationship

Young caretakers might complain about the frustrations and lack of independence caused by the caregiving responsibilities

More knowledge results in decreased uncertainty

Open and honest communication but the amount of information shouldn't pressure the sibling

Older siblings adopt the role of caretakers but they might be stuck between the feeling of burdened and their need of time for recreation

What are some good coping strategies?

There are many different coping strategies that can be used to help siblings of children with brain tumours deal with the unique challenges they face.

The best strategies are based on cognitive behavioural and psycho-educational tools. These coping mechanisms have been shown to improve their self-esteem, lower their anxiety and help them to adapt to their new reality.

The way to achieve this is by identifying misconceptions, and helping them understand the situation through proper education.

Here are strategies to gain more control and in turn reduce stress over a difficult situation:

- Visualize a "happy place" and find time to close your eyes and relax in that state of mind. Identify a few options for happy places as a family. These might be different for everyone - that's okay.
- Think about positive thoughts and self-statements. The "fake it 'til you make it" mentality has been proven to help with positivity such as saying "I can do this".
- Distract yourself with activities or hobbies that take your mind off of stressful topics. Engage in enjoyable activities that are relaxing such as painting, doing yoga, listening to music, watching TV, or even taking a nap.

(continued on next page.)

Here are some more strategies to gain more control and in turn reduce stress over a difficult situation:

- Practice some relaxation techniques to physically calm your body and mentally quiet your mind. These could include controlled breathing (pretending to blow bubbles) or releasing tension from your muscles (squeezing stress balls, clenching & releasing muscles).
- Organize which coping strategies are most effective for you and keep track of them. Write down your thoughts or strategies in a journal. Remind yourself to do practice these exercises frequently.
- Find a friend to support you through your coping strategies. Hold yourself accountable for completing the exercises by having someone else remind you and do them with you. This could be your family or close friend - anyone who makes you feel comfortable and supported.
- Practice physically healthy behaviour such as eating nutritiously healthy meals and exercising regularly.
- Restructure negative thoughts that make them understand what positive learning experience could have come out negative or stressful experiences.
- Establish fun plans and routines to keep positivity consistent within your life. This can help to return life to normal while understanding that there is a "new" normal.

Remember! The frequency depends on you. Most people enjoy practicing these exercises every morning when they wake up or every night before bed.

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SIBLING SUPPORT PROJECT

This resource was created by
Ingram School of Nursing students.

A version in French is also available.

As part of the Sibling Support Project and in addition to this e-booklet, we have created an interactive storybook that makes this information more accessible to children themselves. You can check it out [on our website!](#)



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Megane Pepin - Graphic Designer