

The logo for 'Sibs' is displayed in a large, bold, sans-serif font. The letters are a dark grey color. To the right of the text is a vertical purple bar.

For brothers and sisters
of disabled children and adults

Source Sibs Website

Supporting siblings in schools

Around two pupils in every classroom are at risk for problems with wellbeing and attainment because they have a brother or sister with SEND

Wellbeing and attainment in siblings of children with SEND

“School would have been so much easier if my teachers had known about my sister Katie who is non-verbal and autistic. Growing up we shared the same room so my sleep was interrupted when she had a bad night. That made it hard to concentrate in lessons the next day. My homework – when I had a chance to do it – was regularly scribbled on and when things were difficult at home it was hard to keep my emotions in check. There were so many times I was in need of support or attention at school, but nobody knew.” Laura, sibling

Siblings are a vulnerable group

- Siblings are vulnerable to isolation and bullying. They are more likely than their peers to experience public prejudice, family breakdown and bereavement
- Over half of all young carers in the UK are siblings of disabled children and any sibling can become a young carer during their time at school
- Four out of ten siblings of disabled children live in poverty
- Cuts to services for families of disabled children has increased the negative impact of disability on siblings and reduced the referral options for siblings to get timely support through community groups and CAMHS services
- The positives acquired by siblings such as tolerance, patience and kindness are rarely acknowledged or celebrated by schools

Siblings who are most at risk for problems

Sibling young carers

Example: The sibling who is sleeping in the same room as his brother so that he can alert his mum to his brother's seizures.

Sibling young carers have significantly lower educational attainment at GCSE and are more likely than the national average not to be in education, employment or training (NEET) between the ages of 16 and 19.

Siblings whose brothers and sisters have high levels of behavioural problems

Example: The sibling whose homework is regularly damaged by her brother who has autism and challenging behaviour.

A recent large-scale study in the USA identified siblings of disabled children were almost three times more likely to have significant problems in interpersonal

relationships, psychological well-being, school performance and use of leisure time compared to other siblings.

Some older teenage siblings limit their opportunities for work and further education in order to be available to provide long-term care and support for their disabled brothers and sisters.

Barriers to learning for siblings

Siblings of children who are disabled or have special educational needs or have a serious long-term conditions, come up against barriers to learning and achieving. These barriers can lead to problems with attainment and progress. By being aware of these, school staff can take action to identify them and remove or reduce them for siblings.

Causes of barriers to learning for siblings

Poor Concentration - Disrupted sleep; providing excessive and inappropriate care at home; worry about wellbeing of child with SEND; being bullied; anxiety from experiencing medical emergencies; neglect due to demands of care on parent

Missing time in Lessons - Being late for school whilst parent waits for transport for child with SEND; helping with care at home; needing more sleep after disturbed night; being asked to help child with SEND at school

Poor Pupil Staff Relationships - Being punished for being late or not doing homework; staff insensitivity to pupils with SEND; disabilism or bullying not being dealt with; sibling experiences not acknowledged in school

Homework not completed - Parent not able to support with homework due to care demands for child with SEND; homework disrupted or damaged by child with SEND
Emotional or Behavioural Problems - Bereavement; jealousy of attention to child with SEND; anger; experiencing frequent parental distress; feeling isolated; copying behaviour of child with SEND; family breakdown; real or perceived lack of parental attention; being hurt by child with SEND who has aggressive behaviour; not understanding brother or sister's condition; experiencing public prejudice; a sudden change in a child with SEND's condition or needs

Limited opportunities outside of home - Family finances affected; difficulty having friends home; less time due to helping with care; parent unable to take sibling to after school activities due to child with SEND's care needs; lack of inclusive activities for family.

Recommendations for schools

What's the scale of the problem in your school? The first thing to do is to find out how many siblings of children with SEND are in your school and how many of these are at risk for wellbeing and attainment. Sibs is looking for schools to take part in a pilot project around sibling identification which is being supported by a researcher from the University of Warwick.

Identify siblings as a vulnerable group

- Formally identify all siblings of children and young people with SEND by adding this question to your pupil intake form 'Does this pupil have a brother or sister who is disabled or has special educational needs or a serious long-term illness or condition?'
- Add a column for siblings and sibling interventions to your school's pupil data management system
- Designate a sibling champion within your school Include specific reference to siblings and their needs within your school's policies on safeguarding, behaviour/bullying, young carers, and SEND

Raise whole staff awareness of sibling issues

- Put on a training session for all staff on barriers to learning
- Provide staff with tips for supporting individual siblings of children and young people with SEND at school

Help siblings access specialist information and support

- Signpost siblings to YoungSibs – the UK online support service for siblings of disabled children under 18
- Signpost parents to the parents section of the Sibs website
- Refer siblings to local sibling and young carer groups
- Work in partnership with health and social care to help families find solutions to issues at home that create barriers to learning for siblings

Develop provision for sibling support within school

- Run discussion-based sibling groups to help siblings develop resilience and to gain siblings' views on specific actions that school can take to support them
- Have a named member of staff for pupils to talk to about sibling issues
- Offer one to one sibling support to pupils through your school's existing counselling, mentoring and pastoral care provision
- Run transition groups for year 6 siblings moving up to same secondary school
- Run workshops for parents on supporting siblings and consult with parents on ways your school can support siblings

Top tips for school staff

Use these tips to help make school life and learning easier for a sibling who has a brother or sister with SEND.

1. **Ask siblings how they are regularly** on a one to one basis. This will encourage siblings to come to you for support at a time when things are difficult for them. Ask them about the things they do at home to help their brother or sister; ask them if any things are different at home this week; ask them about what it is like getting homework done at home.
2. **Communicate with parents about siblings.** Ask parents to keep you updated on significant events at home, for example, forthcoming surgery for their disabled child. If a sibling's behaviour, mood or school work undergoes a sudden change, find out if that is in any way related to what is happening with their brother or sister.
3. **Give siblings some extra time and attention** as siblings find it hard when they see most of the attention from parents and professionals being directed at their brother or sister.
4. **Help siblings develop their potential** in areas where they can feel good about themselves and express their feelings. This could be through art, sport, music or drama. Many siblings do not get opportunities to develop interests outside of school due to the demands and costs of care on their family.
5. **Ask others to always address a sibling by their own name.** Siblings are often referred to as someone's brother or sister by professionals and it needs to be clear to siblings that they are important in their own right.
6. **Ensure that siblings are not taken out of class to support their brother or sister with SEND.** Let siblings know that they are not responsible for the care or support of their brothers and sisters at school. Avoid using siblings to interpret for or to assist their brothers and sisters with school activities. Always ask siblings about the level of involvement they want at school with their brother or sister with SEND.
7. **Be zero-tolerant of derogatory language about disability or SEND.** Siblings and pupils with SEND are often teased and bullied because they or their family are different.
8. **Be sensitive to siblings' feelings** when discussing topics such as genetics, death and disability. Many siblings worry about issues such as the implications of having children of their own or their brother or sister's life expectancy.
9. **Tell siblings where they can get more help in school.** If your school has a sibling champion then introduce the sibling to this member of staff, or set up a counselling or pastoral care session for the sibling.
10. **Signpost siblings to www.youngsibs.org.uk** – the UK online support service for siblings of disabled children under 18. Let siblings know that they are not alone and that other siblings have similar feelings and experiences.