

ABOUT SIBLINGS OF CHILDREN AND STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY



Children and students who have one or more siblings with disability have needs of their own. They have the same rights and entitlements as any other child or student to an inclusive education, including a right to access and participate in learning on the same basis as their peers and to be free from harassment or victimisation.

See the online practice guides to find out more:
edi.sa.edu.au/practiceguidance



**Government
of South Australia**

Department for Education

Sibling perspective

The sibling-to-sibling relationship is usually the longest and most enduring across someone's lifetime. Most siblings can see a different side to their brother or sister than their parents or teachers. When you are planning the personalised learning for the student or child with disability, the sibling can be asked if they would like to contribute to the information that you gather at enrolment, or when reports are provided to the family. Before any planning, it is important to ask the sibling what support they need and to keep asking as the answer may change over the course of their education.

Potential impacts on learner with a sibling with disability

- **Limited time and energy**
The relationship with the parent is essential to that child's sense of self. Many parents are exhausted from managing the needs of the child or student with disability. They may have limited time and emotional energy to then devote to other members of the family unit.
- **Hospital visits**
The child or student with disability could have frequent visits to hospital that affect all other members of the family, for example causing worry and concern for the other siblings who remain at home.
- **Responsibilities**
Children or students may carry additional responsibilities, either with their disabled sibling or with other family members. They may be relied on for additional caring responsibilities in the family. This could impact their ability to complete homework assignments or to be punctual.
- **Worry about the sibling**
Siblings could be worried about what may be happening at home with the sibling with disability. They may have the care of other siblings while their parent attends to the needs of the sibling with disability. This can have an impact on their ability to be available for their own learning.
- **Relationships**
Siblings may find challenges in developing their own social relationships. Developing healthy social interactions can be difficult, for example inviting others over to the home can be problematic because the needs of the sibling with disability. Siblings in their teen years can feel like they need to fit in with the perceived norms of the social group. Their sibling may exhibit behaviours that could cause embarrassment, resulting in social isolation.

SIBLINGS OF CHILDREN AND STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY ADJUSTMENTS

EXAMPLES OF ADJUSTMENTS



Homework

- When setting tasks such as homework, be aware that the sibling may have additional responsibilities and demands on their time. Take the time to find out more about the situation if homework is not done properly.



Excursions

- When camps or excursions are planned, the sibling may have additional responsibilities that will result in them being unable to attend. Give enough prior notice to the family to allow them to plan. Even then, the sibling may be unable to attend because of pressing family commitments. Consider alternative activities for the learning experiences to be provided in a different form after all other avenues have been explored.



Autonomy

- Do not ask siblings to help manage behaviours or actions of their brother or sister with a disability unless there are exceptional circumstances. Siblings should be able to pursue their own learning without being interrupted by the actions of the child with disability or being given extra responsibility. Even when they seek it out, reassure them that you have the situation under control.