



National Alliance on Mental Illness

nAMI | Mercer

Serving the New Jersey Capital Area

SIBLING SUPPORT



FOR THOSE WHO HAVE A SIBLING
WITH A MENTAL ILLNESS

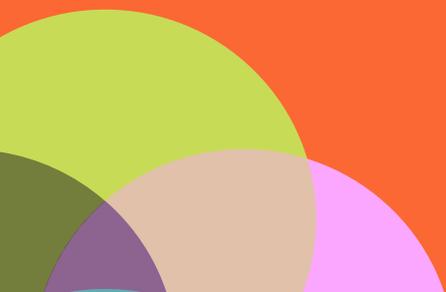


TABLE OF CONTENTS

01 INTRODUCTION

02 WHY DO THESE SIBLINGS NEED HELP?

03 COMMON TERMS FOR THESE SIBLINGS

04 COMMON CHALLENGES

05 TENDENCIES OF THESE SIBLINGS

06 HOW FAMILIES CAN HELP

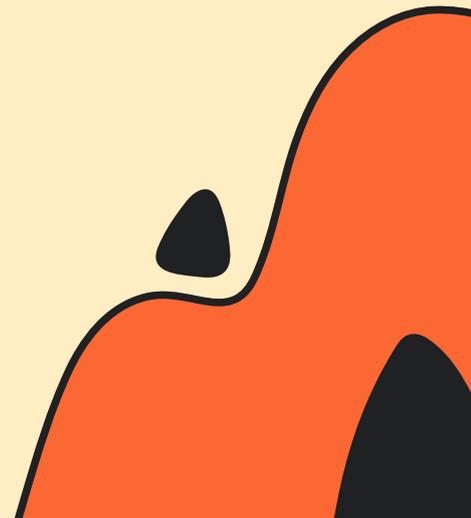
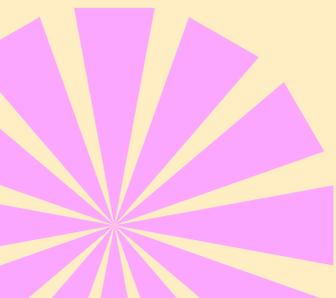
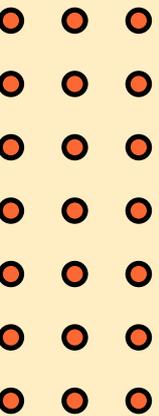
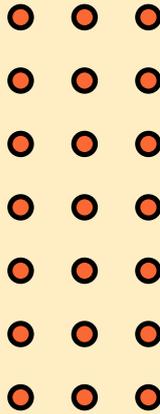
08 WHAT SHOULD I DO?

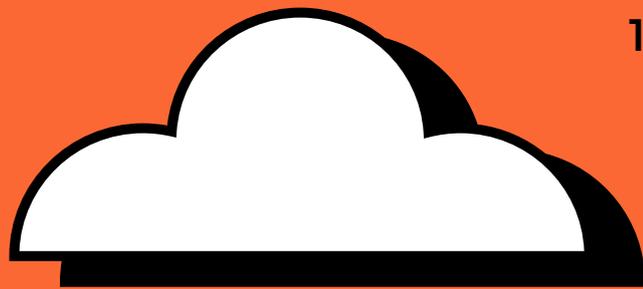
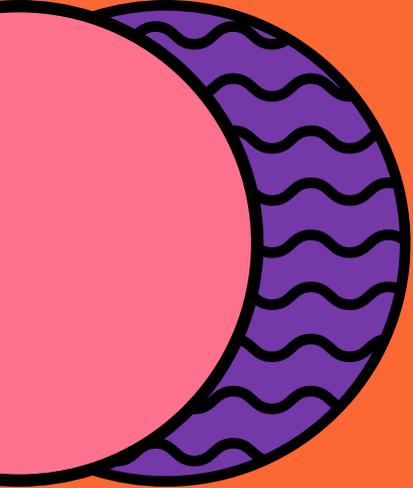
10 TIPS & TRICKS

11 STRENGTHS

12 AUTHOR'S NOTE

13 RESOURCES





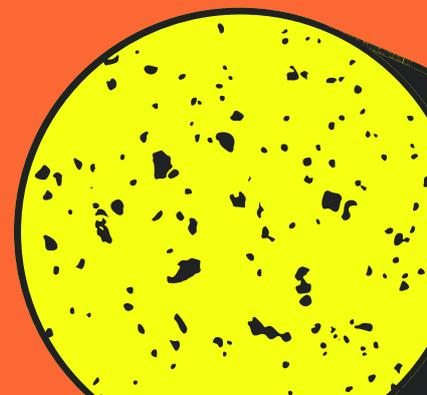
Introduction

This toolkit is to get a conversation going for children and families about making time for all siblings. It will help siblings and families understand the needs that their other siblings have too.



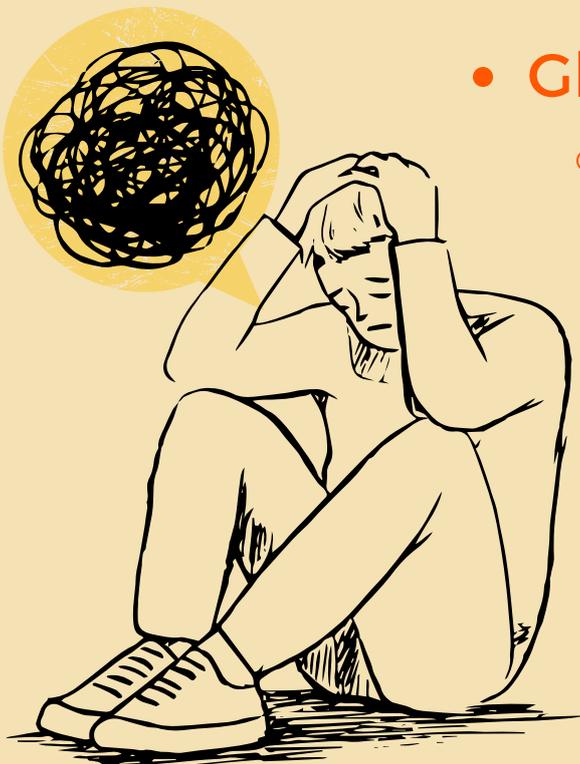
WHY DO THESE SIBLINGS NEED HELP?

The siblings of those with a mental illness are often overlooked when it comes to their own struggles and feel that their problems aren't as severe as their siblings. They tend to mask their own feelings to keep their families unaware of their problems and rely on themselves to figure out ways their own ways to cope.



COMMON TERMS FOR THESE SIBLINGS

- The Well Siblings Syndrome:
 - They are referred to as “well” siblings to differentiate them from their sibling who presents with issues
 - They feel invisible and overshadowed by their sibling’s mental illness.
 - They are subject to greater expectations because parents believe they are more capable



-
- Glass Children Syndrome
 - Like glass, these siblings feel like their parents can see right through them as they focus on their child with a mental illness instead.

COMMON CHALLENGES

- **Navigating Mixed Emotions**
 - As much as you love your siblings there can be feelings of resentment towards them for the attention they receive while also feeling guilty about not having those problems.
- **Growing up too fast**
 - For some siblings, they want to lessen the burdens put on their parents by taking on more responsibilities. While this can help them to learn skills early it can cause the sibling to begin to feel rejection and cause behavioral problems from taking on too much.
- **Feelings of Loss**
 - The unique relationship with your sibling can make you feel like you lost a chance to have the usual sibling bond.



TENDENCIES



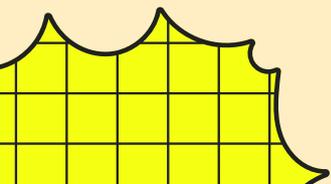
- The need to be the “good” one
- Difficulties with conflict resolution
- People pleasing & difficulty with being assertive
- Underlying anxiety
- Feeling like a caregiver
- Not feeling heard





HOW FAMILIES CAN HELP

- Treat all siblings equitably
- Schedule time for all siblings
- Be open & honest about their sibling's mental illness and special needs
 - Let siblings ask questions & be curious



Give them time & space to feel comfortable opening up about their concerns and feelings



Remember they are not perfect & will make mistakes too

Teach proper coping skills

Avoid letting them take on too many caretaking responsibilities as a sibling



WHAT SHOULD I DO?

1. Say No Without Feeling Guilty

It can be hard to learn how to say no but by doing so it will give you some control to your life especially when you have obligations like school to focus on too.

2. Prioritize Self-Care

Stepping away and taking time for yourself can be difficult but you will be no help to your sibling and yourself if you are not focusing on your mental health.

3. Educate Yourself

It can make it easier when you understand what your sibling is going through and how to help them. It can help you be more understanding and aware.



4. Connect With Others in Similar Situations

Having a support system that understands your challenges will make you feel less isolated and more understood. It helps to have a community to fallback on that can give you advice.



5. Give Yourself a Break

Everyone needs their own time to self reflect and collect themselves. It's okay to ask for time for yourself to take a breather.



TIPS & TRICKS



1. Find your own outlet

This can be anything like

- Joining a sport
- Gaming communities
- Reading
- Journaling
- Hiking
- Dancing

Anything that allows you to have your own space and gives you a chance to do something you love.



2. Advocate for Yourself

Remember that your feelings and your health matter just as much as your siblings. Keep your parents in the loop about how you are doing. If you need help make sure you ask for it.

3. Advocate and Educate

Use your unique sibling relationship to your advantage to educate others around you like classmates about mental health and mental illness. Many people do not understand what mental illnesses are and you have the chance to spread awareness for your sibling and others. You can be their biggest advocate just by staying educated and sharing what you learn with others based off your experience.



STRENGTHS

Never lose sight of your strengths from your unique experience. You have the privilege to learn and embrace a new viewpoint on life that other people do not get.



You are...

Empathetic **Resilient**
Compassionate

Creative

Unique

Helpful

Patient

Accepting of everyone



Author's Note

Emily Bell

I am a senior at Rutgers University pursuing a bachelors in social work and will continue at Rutgers to get a masters in social work this Summer. My older sister, Alicia, is my muse for this toolkit because of our unique relationship given her developmental and intellectual disabilities. I wanted to share my experience of being her sibling because many times we, as the other siblings, feel overlooked because our siblings need more help. Alicia has taught me many valuable lessons that I would not have learned if she were neurotypical. As I get older I grieve the loss of having an older sister that could teach me the ropes, however, it makes me realize how lucky I am to experience life with a sister who sees the world through a completely different lens than I do. We have a unique bond that I would not trade for anything.



Resources

- Sibling Leadership Network
- Sibling Support Project
- SibNet:
 - Online community to connect with other siblings and have a chance to share your experiences

Books:

- Being the Other One by Kate Strohm
- Special Brothers and Sisters: Stories and Tips for Siblings of Children with a Disability or Serious Illness by Annette Hames & Monica McCaffery

The most important
takeaway from this toolkit is
for you to remember that
you are just as important as
your sibling.



YOU ARE DOING GREAT!
KEEP GOING!