

# How to Talk To Your Kids About a Special Needs Sibling

About 12 percent of 6- to 14-year-olds have some type of disability. How can you help their sibs cope?

By Penny Musco

**Give them a place to vent.** Julian Canha, of Montclair, NJ, has a younger brother, Justin, with autism. Their mother, Maria Teresa, enrolled Julian in a sibling group at Justin's school. The Sibling Support Project ([siblingsupport.org](http://siblingsupport.org) (<http://siblingsupport.org>)) has almost 400 sibling support groups, called Sibshops, in almost every state.

**Allow for some embarrassment.** Tweens especially may sometimes shrink away when their special-needs sib shines a spotlight on them both. "If he wants to walk on the other side of the mall and pretend not to know you or his special sibling, go ahead and let him. Hope and have faith that if you give him some space, he'll eventually reintegrate his sibling back into his social circle," says Don Meyer, director of the Sibling Support project. In his experience, sibs generally do come around again, once they're a little more mature.

**Let your child take the lead.** Give him a chance to explain his sib's condition to his buddies in his own words, and you may be surprised. Kids often know better how to talk to each other than adults do.

**Focus on the positive.** "If parents see the disability as a series of challenges that they face with as much grace and humor as they can muster, their kids will, too," says Meyer.



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