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SIBLINGS AND HAEMOPHILIA

Jane Portnoy



When you have a bleeding disorder, your siblings might be even more important than usual.

We all know that siblings can have a love/hate relationship and people with bleeding disorders are not immune from this. However, the contributions of brothers and sisters can be positive on so many levels. At the same time, siblings can also suffer and are at higher risk for mental health problems than the general population. This is why it is important to look after your siblings. There are many ways for you to support them.

Sometimes you can feel like your siblings are a little annoying or caught up in their own lives. The upside of siblings is they are often there to help you get through the difficult times, small and large. They might provide a distraction during a venepuncture (infusion), or when you are in pain. They might keep you company while you are waiting for your medical appointment, or when you are stuck at home in a COVID lockdown. You have a readymade friend - of course, you won't always see eye to eye, and sometimes you really have to work at it.

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Siblings understand when others can't. They have insight into your relationship with your parents and are in position to be your strongest ally.

In families where someone has a bleeding disorder, brothers and sisters are regularly recognised as being a strong positive force. They see what you have to go through. They can usually be relied on to be honest, sometimes brutally honest. This works well when you need a reality check, or some advice. They can also be good company and provide a distraction when you need one.

We know that it helps your mental health to have a sibling, but did you know that they can have a difficult time being in a family with a child with a chronic illness. It's important to take care of them as much as they take care of you. This might involve including your brother or sister in what's going on, talking to them and help them understand what you are going through. Making time for your sibling shows them that they are important and you also give them a chance to talk through things that they need to discuss.

You can also watch out for them and identify when they might be having a hard time. Not sure how to go about it? Talk to the other people who help you. The same support system that you have can help you work out who is the best person to help them.

WHO ELSE CAN SUPPORT YOU?

- The **social workers and psychologists at Haemophilia Treatment Centres (HTCs)** are always available to support you and your siblings
- **Your local GP**
- **Headspace** - www.headspace.org.au
- **Little Dreamers, for young carers** - www.littledreamers.org.au (young carers are young people who provide unpaid support to a loved one who has a disability, illness or addiction.) Little Dreamers run a wonderful range of programs, including online support and holiday programs.

FURTHER READING

Scott, Gillian. **5 tips to help siblings of kids with bleeding disorders: parents can help brothers and sisters cope with a range of emotions.**

<https://hemaware.org/life/5-tips-help-siblings-kids-bleeding-disorders>

In this article in *Hemaware*, the bleeding disorders magazine of the National Hemophilia Foundation in the USA, Gillian Scott gives tips to help siblings of kids with bleeding disorders.

She suggests

- communicate,
- educate,
- include,
- make time for everyone, and
- find resources.

These tips are spot on, and the article is a good short read.

Inclendon E, Williams L, Hazell T, Heard T, Flowers A, Hiscock H. **A review of factors associated with mental health in siblings of children with chronic illness.** *Journal of Child Health Care.* 2015; 19(2): 182-194. doi:10.1177/1367493513503584

This is an interesting review of 17 studies and includes one study done at the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne. They found that the research demonstrates that sibling mental health is improved with information, professional support and attendance at camps, and perceived parent and peer support. . ■