

Impact of ASD on siblings

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For the first ten years of our life we went to the same school. During this time we were both often subjected to bullying by other children. As anyone with a sibling who has difficulties knows, children can be tremendously cruel when faced with someone so very different from themselves. I wavered between defending my sister with resilience and anger, and turning away from my sister in an attempt to be accepted as part of the crowd. I loved her in my own private world but would feel antagonistic toward her and embarrassed by her presence sometimes. The guilt even at this age was something I lived with on a daily basis.

Cresseda.
Accessed from www.nas.org.uk

As I grew older, I became more self conscious and embarrassed of Alexis's anti-social behaviour. I'd feel embarrassed if my friends came to my house, in case they thought badly of Alexis or, just as importantly, of me, for the way he behaved. He'd go through phases of peeing on heaters to watch the steam rise, and pushing people, and picking fluff off their jumpers, and having tantrums. He was rarely quiet, and although he's never talked, he seems to like the sound of his own voice. My friends never reacted as badly as I expected them to, but the anxiety was always there.

Celeste
Accessed from www.nas.org.uk

Common sibling emotions ?

- Frustration
 - Disappointment
 - Embarrassment
 - Sadness
 - Indifference
 - Angry
 - Self doubt
 - Jealousy
 - Worry
 - Anxiety
- These emotions are not unique to this group of siblings but there are special demands growing up in a household with a brother or sister with ASD that require understanding.

From the age of 15, I had a huge responsibility in looking after my sister. When my parents were at work, it was up to me to get her prepared for school: to wash her, dress her, and feed her. Looking back on this, it was probably too much for me to cope with at the time, but I had no idea how to convey my feelings.

Lola Fisher
Accessed from www.nas.org.uk

Jane is the five -year old sister of Adam, an eight-year old boy with autism.
Adam has been assessed as having a developmental age of three and has recently started to speak although this is mainly echolalia. Adam and Jane attend the same local school.
Adam communicates using visual supports but there are times, particularly when he is tired or anxious, that he can be destructive or throws things. Jane finds this quite frightening and she has been given clear instruction on what to do if this happens at home which is to go and find Mum or Dad.
Whilst in the school play ground Adam had a prolonged and noisy tantrum witnessed by Jane and some of her classmates. Jane overheard one of the other pupils say that Adam had some sort of sickness.
Jane became quite distressed and upset and Mum had to be called into the school. On questioning Jane it became apparent that she was unsure what was expected of her when this happened in school. Jane also thought that 'sickness' was something that could be caught and she too could 'get autism'. Jane required reassurance and explanation from both the teacher and her parents.

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How can we help?

- Address the information needs
- Teach practical skills
- Provide support

My younger brother Adam has Asperger syndrome. I almost wrote that he suffers from it, but he doesn't. He survives it, he conquers it and he embraces it. From the moment he was diagnosed he has gone from strength to strength. He is so much more confident and happy knowing how to manage his behaviour and learning that he can live a life just as normal, or as abnormal, as he wishes.

Even though at times I get incredibly frustrated with him, I'm always here for him and I would never change him for the world. Because Adam is who he is because of his Asperger's and he's perfect just the way he is.

Sara Usher
