



# A Siblings Guide to Autism.

## First, what is Autism?

Autism is a complex brain disorder that affects the way a person's brain works. It is one of a group of disorders called "Autism Spectrum Disorder," also referred to as "ASD." A spectrum disorder can include many symptoms.

Even though there are many people with Autism, each person is very different in terms of his or her challenges, abilities, and personality. Some people with Autism may require a lot of help, while others need less assistance at home, school, and in the community.

Often people with autism have difficulties in three areas:

- **Talking or expressing their thoughts**

It can be hard for a person with Autism to express their thoughts and to understand what others are saying. They can also find it difficult to use language and some people with Autism may not be able to talk at all. Many kids with Autism have unusual ways of learning, paying attention, or reacting to different feelings.

- **Learning how to play with others**

People with Autism may be easily frustrated in social situations, making it difficult to develop and maintain friendships. They have a harder time learning how to play and interact with others.

- **Unusual Behaviour**

Some people with Autism act or behave in unusual ways. For example, they may suddenly make sounds and move their bodies in unexpected ways. They may make less eye contact and don't always like to be touched.

People with autism sometimes also have some strong abilities. Each person is different, so the abilities are unique to that person, but they may include:

- A favourite subject that they know a lot about
- May be really good at art, music or math
- Can be very loyal and honest
- Can have a really good memory
- Can be really good at puzzles

Just as you have some things that are hard for you and some things that are easier, so does your brother or sister with Autism.

It is important for you and your family to understand your brother or sister's unique challenges and special abilities, so he or she feels accepted and supported.

## QUESTIONS ABOUT AUTISM

### **What causes Autism?**

No one is certain yet what causes Autism, but it's likely that there are many things such as your genes you inherited from your parents and also things in the environment. Just as there are many different types of Autism, there are also a variety of things that contribute to the development of the disorder.

Researchers are working hard to figure out what causes Autism so they can better identify what kinds of therapies work best for treating it.

### **Can I get Autism from my sibling?**

Autism is not contagious. You cannot catch Autism like a cold or the flu. So, you don't have to worry about getting it from your sibling or others you know who have Autism.

### **How many people have Autism in the world?**

We are not sure how many people in the world have Autism. More countries are starting to document the number of people with Autism more accurately. In the United States, a recent study found that 1 out of 110 people in the United States have Autism. For some reason, boys seem to have Autism more often than girls. The rate of autism in boys is 1 in 70 and for girls it is 1 in 315. But this may just be the way boys display Autism by comparison to girls. No one is sure just yet.

# YOUR BROTHER OR SISTER HAS AUTISM

It's okay to have feelings about having a brother or sister with Autism, but it doesn't help to keep those feelings to yourself. Remember, your Mum and Dad may have similar feelings, and it's important to share what is going on with you and how all of this affects you. So don't hesitate to seek out someone in your family, a teacher, or friend with whom you can be open and honest about your questions and feelings.

Learning that your brother or sister has Autism can be a very difficult. You may have seen behaviours that upset you? Hearing the word "Autism" might be confusing for you? During this time, your life and that of your family may feel different than your friends and so on. You may be worried about how this will affect the future? Sometimes you may also worry about how your family will cope?

It is very important to remember that your brother or sister is just like any other child, except he or she has Autism. This is a time for you and your family to learn as much as you can about the condition. Your support is very important and will help your brother or sister to improve and be the best they can be.

## **Some things you may be having trouble with:**

- Understanding why your brother or sister acts in what seems to be strange ways.
- Feeling like your brother and sister gets more time and attention from your parents than you do.
- Feeling embarrassed about your brother or sister's behaviours when you are with friends or out and about, like at a store where other people may stare at you or react badly.
- Not knowing how to play with your brother and sister.

## **Some questions you may have:**

- Will I get to spend alone time with my Mum or Dad? Do they still care about me?
- How much time do I have to play with my brother or sister? What can we do that he or she will like? Is it OK to want to spend time without my brother or sister?
- How can I explain my brother or sister's behaviour to my friends?
- Why doesn't my brother or sister have to do chores and other things around the house like I have to do?

# HOW YOU CAN HELP

Your relationship with your brother or sister is very important. So it makes sense that you will want to spend time together and for you both to feel comfortable and safe when you are playing (as well as have fun).

There may be times that your brother or sister does something suddenly or in an unusual way that can cause you to feel frustrated and upset. Ask your parent(s) about things that you and your brother and sister can do together. It is important for you to know the best ways to interact with your sibling.

It may take a little time and a lot of patience to learn how to play with your brother or sister, but it will be worth it in the end. As you spend time with your sibling, it is likely you will get to know him or her better and you will start to appreciate the differences between the two of you.

Many siblings like you have said that it can be hard to get close to a sibling with Autism. Sometimes, how your sibling's behaves may make it seem like he or she is not interested, or you may have difficulty getting his or her attention.

Finding an activity you can do with your brother or sister will allow you to have fun and enjoy each other's company.

## **Some activities you may enjoy doing with your brother or sister:**

1. Playing a board game or working on a puzzle.
2. Playing an interactive video game.
3. Playing a physical game, like tag or jumping on a trampoline.

Your brother or sister is still your sibling and always will be, so it's important to have a good relationship. Together as a family, you can figure out ways to make sure everyone is happy!

# YOU ARE NOT ALONE – HOW TO ASK FOR HELP

Sometimes kids who have a brother or sister with Autism can feel lonely. A good way to deal with this feeling is to share with others like you who can understand what you are going through. Talking to your family or to a good friend can help.

There are often special support groups for young people like you where you can talk to other kids about what it is like to have a brother or sister with Autism. This type of support group is called a “peer support group”. When young people get involved in such a group, they often find new ways of dealing with situations and almost always feel less alone.

Having a family member with Autism can often take extra time for everyone in the family, and very often siblings feel that their brother or sister becomes the centre of everyone’s attention. It is easy to feel like your parents have little time or energy left to share with you.

Your parents and others you trust can help you work through some of the feelings you are having. Some common feelings are anger, resentment, sadness and frustration. Most likely, your reactions and feelings are perfectly normal and it does help to talk about them rather than to feel like you have to keep the feelings inside or to express them in ways that may cause family conflicts.

Because you have a sibling with special needs who may take up a lot of time and energy from your parents, it is important to know about yourself and what is special about you. You need to feel important too.

The best way you can do this is to talk honestly with others who understand. Keeping it all to yourself may seem the best thing to do, but it really isn’t. Those around you love you and really do want to help you. But they can’t do that if they don’t know that anything is wrong. You may think that your parent(s) have enough to do looking after your brother or sister. But you have a right to be looked after too and Mum and Dad want to do that, but you must talk to them.

Don’t try and do it when your brother or sister is making things difficult though. The best time (if possible) is when they are being looked after and you can have your parents full attention. If you are not sure when this might happen, ask them to set some time aside for you.

But remember, honesty is always the best way forward. If something is upsetting you or making you frustrated or mad, you **MUST** say so.

Finally, if an adult has given you this to read, then they already know that you may need help. Start by talking with them.

Best of luck.