

FACT SHEET

Supporting siblings

Finding the words to discuss limb difference with a sibling can sometimes be difficult. It often depends on their age, level of understanding and ability to engage in discussion. It may also be influenced by your own family structure, cultural factors and social issues.

Siblings of children with limb differences often possess greater compassion, better understand disability, demonstrate higher levels of loyalty, and be more open to diversity in our community.

It's valuable to initiate and maintain 'open communication' when you think it's appropriate. Having open communication, recognising potential challenges faced by siblings, identifying how you can assist, and knowing when to seek support is important.

But it's important to remember that, like any family, challenges and issues not related to limb difference will occur at times. This is a natural feature of sibling relationships and family structures.

This Fact Sheet provides information about ways of talking to a sibling about their brother or sister's limb difference, challenges faced by some siblings and ways of providing support.

Talking to a sibling about limb difference

When speaking with siblings always be honest and truthful. Try to be realistic, use positive language and have conversations that are appropriate to their age.

For very young children there may not be a need to discuss their brother or sister's limb difference yet, and as they grow up it can be gradually introduced.

If you meet or see pictures of children or adults with limb difference it can be good to mention that they are similar to their sibling.

When talking to a sibling about limb difference you could:

- explain how it occurred - to allay any worries they may have that it will happen to them or that they caused it
- discuss the language your family wants to use to talk about their sibling's limb difference
- explain that everyone is different, but try to limit over-emphasising your child's limb difference or allowing it to become a key feature of their identity
- remind them that they have more in common with their brother or sister than they have differences
- assist them to become confident when others ask about their brother or sister's limb difference.

Challenges faced by some siblings

While there are many positive aspects to being the sibling of a child with limb difference, some children may encounter some challenges from time-to-time.

While some children may appear to be OK, their behaviour may reveal that they aren't coping as well as you thought. There may also be different reactions depending on their age.

They may be feeling:

- inconsequential - that their sibling matters more than they do
- that they are viewed as the sibling of a child with disability, rather than the individual they are
- confused about how they feel about their sibling (e.g. love, anger, jealousy or resentment)
- responsible for looking after and protecting their sibling (particularly at school or during peer activities)
- embarrassed or sad about others' reactions to their sibling's limb difference
- frustrated, sad or guilty about their sibling not being able to play in the same way they can
- worried about their future and/or that of their sibling
- that they need to keep any worries to themselves and not burden parents or carers with these.

Tactics for supporting a sibling

There are many ways that you can support your child, including:

- answering any questions calmly and honestly
- encouraging them to talk freely about their feelings
- letting them know that it's OK to feel angry, sad or frustrated at times
- celebrating their personal achievements
- seeking professional support if they are not coping.

Sometimes your child will share their feelings with you directly. But, at other times, they might not openly express concerns and instead demonstrate these through other behaviours such as:

- withdrawing from social situations
- excessive 'acting up' and/or attention seeking
- being overly concerned with being the 'good child' or 'people pleaser' in order to achieve recognition and approval.

Accessing support

If you think that your child needs some additional support, speak with your GP, social worker or a psychologist.

You may want to speak to a Limbs 4 Life team member who can assist you. You may also want to speak to another parent who has experienced what you are going through. If so, Limbs 4 Life can connect you to a trained Peer Support Volunteer who you can speak to. Visit our website or call us for more information and links to our online support.

Several organisations exist to assist siblings, including:

Siblings Australia

www.siblingsaustralia.org.au

Kids Helpline

www.kidshelp.com.au

www.limbs4kids.org.au | T: 1300 782 231 | E: kids@limbs4life.org.au

The Limbs 4 Kids program is an initiative of Limbs 4 Life, Australia's peak organisation for amputees and those living with limb difference. Limbs 4 Kids ensures that all Australian children and young people with limb difference, as well as all of those who care for them, receive access to information and support.