

Special Siblings

Havelka, D., Bartošová, K. (2019) Speciální sourozenci

Reviewed by Eva Švecová

David Havelka studied psychology and special education and works as a psychologist in clinical psychology at the Children's Department of the Psychiatric Hospital in Šternberk. Kateřina Bartošová studied psychology. She works in a private therapeutic practice and also as an assistant professor at the Institute of Psychology of the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University.

The publication "Special Siblings" is intended primarily for parents of children with specific needs who have another child (or more) who is, compared to their sibling, a typically developing individual. The book is also addressed to professionals and educators (providing care to individuals with special needs). These experts can be a source of information for the parents of these children, their siblings, but also for their near and wider surroundings. It is a specialized theoretical and practical text providing the necessary information and advice on how to deal with siblings of individuals with disabilities and how to help them. The book continually shows passages with advice and ideas on how to work with children in given situations. There are also many examples from a real life or statements from parents or siblings without specific needs.

The book is divided into three main parts. The first one is devoted to the family of a child with disabilities, it is divided into two separate chapters. The first chapter is devoted to psychological functioning of parents. Parents are always exposed to stress, and families of children with disabilities have more stressors, where the greatest of stressors may be the manifestations of disability. These can also be associated with invariable health status. For example, education about disability in the extended and narrower family, but also among friends and at school, can be a relief from stress in the family. In this chapter, you can find references to the first two appendixes of the book – the first appendix is the mythbuster cheat sheet, where, at clear points, the assumptions that are still common but mistaken in society are refuted. The second

appendix is a simple drawing that shows where to look for help (experts or intervention programs). The functioning of the family as a whole is the title of Chapter Two. Since the presence of a child with disabilities affects family well-being, it affects the relationship as well as the functionality of the marriage. There may be a decrease in the number of activities spent together as a family. This can have a negative impact on the time spent with a healthy sibling and can be reflected in their emotions and consequently behavior. The family can resist these negative impacts by regular activities with a healthy individual, but above all by frequent and appropriately chosen form of communication.

The second part of the book deals with a sibling. This section again contains two separate chapters. The third chapter of the book discusses sibling in general. It describes what makes the sibling relationship specific and unique. In this chapter, the reader will find the first mention of the STEPS program (Group Therapy-Educational Program for Siblings of Children with Disabilities). STEPS is further described in Chapter Seven. The fourth chapter describes the sibling relationship with a disabled child. There are mentioned specifics of sibling relationship in particular types of disabilities (autism spectrum disorders, Down syndrome, mental disability, hyperkinetic disorder – ADHD and also oncological diseases). A healthy sibling is the subject of the second part of the fourth chapter. The authors describe the factors influencing the sibling relationship. These factors may be, for example, the age of children, the order of siblings, the sex of a healthy sibling and, last but not least, knowledge of the sibling's disabilities. Furthermore, the chapter summarizes the specific problems of healthy siblings. Healthy siblings may suffer from problems in emotional experience and behavior, may have difficulty adapting to the situation. The chapter also deals with four main areas related to problematic behavior of healthy siblings. These are confrontations with their sibling's problematic behavior and difficulties, lack of knowledge and understanding of their sibling's problems, changes in the family functioning and lack of sources of support and specific emotional demands. As throughout the book, there are passages where the authors offer tips and tricks that can be used to work with typically developing siblings.

The last part of the book outlines the possibilities of supporting healthy siblings. There are six chapters in this section. In the fifth chapter, the reader will find tables where, according to the answers to the questions, it is possible to orientately assess whether the healthy sibling has coped badly or on the contrary well with the sibling's disability. The recorded responses may be a signal to some parents to look for professional help. The sixth chapter deals with the prevention of mental problems in siblings of children with disabilities, in this case the authors express their opinions on the prevention of these problems. In case of a manifestation of problems (prevention did not work correctly or did not help), parents can contact professional help. The possibilities of individual support from experts are discussed in chapter seven.

Pediatricians, child psychiatrists, psychologists (pediatric clinical psychologist, school psychologist or counseling psychologist), special pedagogues and psychotherapists can help. Non-profit organizations, group programs for siblings of children with disabilities, as exemplified by the above-mentioned STEPS program, can also provide assistance to siblings of children with disabilities. The program consists of ten two-hour meetings a week. In the individual exercises, the children go through situational exercises, experiential training blocks, problem solving training, games, discussions, psychomotor exercises and dramatherapy. The main objectives of the program are to strengthen the sibling relationship, to transfer knowledge about disability, to improve the level of mental adaptation and quality of life, to practice ways of seeking and asking for support from loved ones, to solve problems and to train difficult situations typical for living with a disabled sibling. The authors of this publication are involved in this program. The support options also include the Internet (but in this case it is necessary to be cautious for the adequacy and validity of the information), work with the book and work with the film (these sections refer to Appendixes 3 and 4 for a list of books and films, where siblings of children with disabilities occur). The eighth chapter describes the possibilities of parental support. This chapter is again linked with tips and tricks that parents can use. Furthermore, the eighth chapter contains answers to questions in which parents trying to maintain the best possible relationship with their children are interested. The following chapter is mainly devoted to parents. It emphasizes the important idea that parents must not forget about themselves and their needs. Because the most important thing for children's satisfaction is that the parent is happy. The last, tenth chapter is devoted to the grandparents of children with disabilities, because they also participate in the functioning of the family and are its very important members.

This publication is written in a very readable way. It is intended for professionals but also for parents, therefore it is written comprehensibly for individuals who are not oriented in the issue of special education. It offers a wide range of advice that can be used and tried while raising children.

Mgr. Eva Švecová
Institute of Special Education Studies
Faculty of Education
Palacký University Olomouc
Žižkovo náměstí 5
771 40 Olomouc
Czech Republic
e-mail: eva.svecova01@upol.cz