



Parenting Special Siblings

Conversation Starters for Parents

Be intentional about seeking opportunities to understand your children and make it easy for them to reflect and process their own thoughts and feelings without your judgement. Once in a while, insert questions casually into conversation (e.g., while driving in the car) or set aside a devoted time (e.g., meet at a coffee shop) to listen to your child's heart and understand his/her perspectives. Add your own spontaneous follow-up questions to show interest and explore for deeper understanding. Resist your urges to evaluate the responses, become emotional or offer solutions (unless your child asks for them). Help your child to feel as safe as possible to answer honestly and vulnerably. It is usually best to ask only one or two of these questions during any single conversation. Too many questions all at once can be overwhelming for anyone, especially a child. Enjoy having these kinds of conversations on and off over the years. A child's answers and perspectives are likely to change and evolve with time.

1. What is a memorable story for you (positive or negative) about growing up with a sister/brother who has special needs?
2. How is your life different from your friends' lives because you have a sibling with special needs?
3. What do you think is hard about being the sister/brother of someone with special needs?
4. Do you have any regrets or disappointments about being the sister/brother of someone with special needs?
5. What do you think are my/our strengths as your parent(s)?
6. What do you think are our strengths as a family who has some special needs?
7. What is it about being a special sibling that is shaping you into the person you are today (positively and negatively)?
8. Do you have any worries, fears or questions about your sister/brother with special needs?
9. How does being the sister/brother of someone with special needs affect your relationships with other people (friendships, dating, activities, etc.)?
10. What do you wish your friends or other people knew about you or your family as it relates to your experience with special needs?
11. At this point, what are your greatest hopes for your sister/brother's future and your relationship with him/her?
12. What could I do to help you have a better relationship with your sisters/brothers?
13. What do you think could make our relationship better (as parent and child)?



Strengthening Your Special Family

Guide for Parent Reflection

Periodic reflective conversations about your children and family experience can strengthen your relationship/marriage and the effectiveness of your parenting. Even when these discussions are difficult, many parents find it encouraging and ultimately helpful to deepen their understanding of each other, explore their vision together and process perspectives out loud. Be intentional and persistent in creating opportunities to understand your spouse and make it easy for him/her to reflect and process his/her own thoughts and feelings without your judgement. Make a date at a coffee shop or grab a favorite beverage and sit down on the patio in the evening after children are in bed. Savor and rest on just one or two of these questions per conversation.

Even in situations of divorce, it is very helpful to explore these issues together whenever possible. Your children will benefit from parents who are regularly exploring their family's unique strengths and opportunities to grow as well as the parents' shared/individual hopes and dreams for their children.

1. So far, what are some of your favorite memories about raising our children, including the experience of having a child with special needs?
2. What do you think are our strengths (individually and together) as parents of a family who experiences special needs?
3. In what ways do you think we've been weak, vulnerable or most challenged as parents of a family experiencing special needs?
4. In what ways do you wish we could do better as parents in a family experiencing special needs?
5. What is especially hard for you about parenting our child with special needs?
6. Do you have any regrets, disappointments or grief triggers as it relates to being the parent of a child with special needs?
7. What is it about being the parent of a child with special needs that has shaped you into the person you are today?
8. What is one thing we could do differently or better as parents to help our children have healthy and improving relationships with each other?
9. If there were no limitations because of disability in our family, what would be on your wish list for our marriage/relationships?
10. What is one *doable* way we could create a positive vacation experience for our family? (Maybe it's not the kind of vacation we dream about, but it would be better than doing nothing and better than what we've been trying so far.)