

## Chapter 79

# Sibling Disposition Towards Children With Special Needs

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### ABSTRACT

*The background research leading to this chapter probed into the nature of disposition and dominant patterns of feelings displayed by typically developing siblings towards children with special needs arising out of communication disorders. The resultant findings may contribute to facilitation of constructive relationship between them. A survey type of research design was adopted for the purpose of collecting relevant data from primary caregivers of 34 children with communication disorders resulting from either sensory impairments, or neurodevelopmental disorders. An emotional-behavioral rating scale including 10 common dispositions of siblings towards children with special needs had been developed for the purpose following review of relevant literature. The caregiver-participants were to rate the frequency of manifestation of the emotions or behaviors described on a four-pointing rating scale of never, sometimes, often or always. Other relevant information like number of siblings, order of birth, gender of children with special needs, as well as educational and socio-economic status of the caregivers were collected. Analysis of the data revealed feelings of concern and care predominantly prevalent among siblings of children with special needs. Nevertheless, there is scope for further shaping the positive dispositions into constructive behaviors that support optimal development of children with special needs.*

### INTRODUCTION

In contrast to conventional models for disability rehabilitation that were based on legal perceptions and medical remedies, the contemporary emphasis is on processes that are founded on human rights and grounded in the community. Thus the growing child with differential abilities is no longer viewed as one who is disabled or different, but as one who is in need of special provisions like early identification,

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timely intervention with appropriate strategies and need-based technology that leads to an independent and productive life assimilated in the social milieu. In this context, along with the professional provisions from expert rehabilitators, the integral involvement of family and local community becomes equally important. Fostering a healthy and supportive relationship between children with special needs and their family, which is their immediate social environment, is essential for having a conducive and constructive life. Traditional family set-ups are led by adult members like parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts who are mature with a natural inclination to take care of needs of children with special needs in the family. Budding members like siblings and cousins are also an integral part of the family whose acceptance and support make more sense and are better appreciated by children with special needs. However, young growing children may not have necessary maturity to stand up to these expectations. This chapter is based on an independent survey undertaken to investigate the existing trends in attitudes and behaviors of typically developing siblings of children with communication disorders with an intention of discerning means for enhancing sibling participation in their development.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Importance of Family in Development of Children**

The word ‘family’ might seem to be a simple, single word, but it has multifaceted implications attached to it according to the perspective in which it is being described. The plainest definition describes it as a group consisting of biological parents and their offspring living together as a unit. Further, deliberations may vary according to the economic, cultural, social and several other aspects depending on the context under consideration; but the common aspect among the members in every family is their mutual love, affection and significance of those people who belong to their family (Blessing, n.d.).

Children imbibe their natural behaviors from their families. Research indicates that the development of positive behaviors in a young child is significantly influenced by how well his or her family functions. Childhood dependency on caregivers not only helps children in fulfillment of immediate life needs, but in the long run also helps them imbibe the characteristics and values observed in the family. These in turn help children develop the ability to handle demands and crises in life drawing from the psychological resources gained from early family experiences (Mahalihali, n.d.).

For a child born into a family, it becomes the first social institution executing the primary role of fostering a healthy environment where the members are committed to each other and communicate frequently and fluently without impinging into each others’ freedom or space. Thereby family becomes the field for initial social exposure for a child that shapes his/her self-worth, attitudes, values and behavior; thus playing a crucial role promoting skills, morals and values among children (Swindoll, n.d.).

The family further espouses the complex psychosocial development of young children to mature and function as integrated persons in their own right in the larger society outside the family. Through the care and attention tendered during their early years, families enhance the ability in children to discriminate between social, asocial and anti-social trends, strengthen their resolute to encounter and manage adversities, and thus enable them to establish stronger ties with people outside the family. Eventually, a conducive family environment wherein children’s material, psychosocial and emotional requirements are met helps them turn out to be both socially and psychologically well-adjusted adults (Rupured and Quick, 1989).

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