

## Siblings

- Introduction
- Styles of sibling development
- Through siblings' eyes

### *Break*

- Through parents' eyes
- Explaining Autism
- Practical strategies
- Finally ...



### Activity

## Siblings

The dynamics among brothers and sisters are so complex and diverse that they almost defy any attempt at scientific observation!

What we want to do in this session before the break, is look at some of the general themes of sibling development and also some of the issues for siblings and parents when there is an Autistic child or young person in the family.

After the break, we want to look at possible practical strategies for parents and siblings. We also hope that you'll find time to share your experiences and realise that you're not alone.

The idea of the quiz is to provide the opportunity to discuss some beliefs that people may have about siblings of Autistic children.

## ACTIVITY

Hand out the quiz. Explain that this activity is usually done individually, but it can be done in pairs or groups if people prefer.

ASK people to go through the statements marking each one 'true' or 'false' or 'maybe', and explain that you'll be discussing the answers when everyone has finished.

## Styles of sibling development

- No single prescription
- Deep part of our lives
- Personality important
- Changes with age and age difference



### Styles of sibling development

There is **no single prescription** for the 'ideal' sibling relationship as this can be influenced by such factors as age, gender, extended family, friends and disability.

It is a myth that siblings should naturally just get along, being loving, affectionate, and supportive of each other. The earliest research on relationships among siblings developed the common theme that brothers and sisters relate to each other mainly in a rivalrous way, competing for parental attention and status within the family unit. Rivalry between siblings received so much attention initially because Sigmund Freud theorized in 1949 that this aspect of sibling relationships was a key to subsequent personality differences.

### Deep part of our lives

Brothers and sisters are not just siblings in childhood. These relationships, at least in the formal sense, continue across a lifetime. For many adults, the person who has known us the longest and understands our history is our sibling.

Claims that birth order **affects personality** have received mixed support from research<sup>8</sup> but, nevertheless, some perceptions do exist.

*First born* (eldest) children are goal setters, hard working, responsible, rule keepers, determined and organised. They're more likely to want to be in charge whether at work or play and will strive for high-paying jobs or want to be the best in their field – 21 of 23 astronauts have been first born.

*Middle born* children are flexible, generous, social, diplomatic and peace keepers. They are often team players or managers.

*Last born* (youngest) are outgoing, uncomplicated, affectionate, humorous, absent-minded, risk-takers, and more often question authority. They often find themselves in sales and creative positions.

**ASK parents for their experiences of the above.**

Of course, sibling relationships change with age and are affected by age differences, as the next few slides will show.

## Practical strategies for parents

### Managing peers

#### *Being teased?*

- Acknowledge feelings
- Rehearse rescue phrases
- Talk to school?

#### *Bringing their friends home?*

- OK to tell friends
- OK to bring friends home
- OK to do activities without brother or sister



### Managing peers

*Are siblings being teased or bullied by their peers for having a brother or sister on the Autistic spectrum?*

- Validate and acknowledge the sibling's feelings of frustration and become familiar with signs of distress caused by trouble with peers.
- Rehearse with siblings how to handle unpleasant remarks.
- **ASK parents for examples** and think of possible answers.
- Talk with the sibling's teacher to encourage knowledge and positive attitudes about disabilities.

*Do siblings worry about bringing their peers into the home?*

- Let siblings know how they can explain their brother's or sister's health needs to their peers (explaining Autism).
- ASK parents to think of and agree an explanation.

- Invite the sibling's friends into the home when their brother or sister is at home and also when they are away.
- Make it clear to siblings that it is all right for them to engage in activities without their brother or sister.