



SIBLING SOCIETY

Guide 2 - Being There for Your Siblings

Introduction

Who is this guide for?

This guide is for *teen siblings** of children with cancer or other serious illnesses** who want to learn how to start or navigate sensitive conversations about processing the diagnosis at an early stage. If you're involved in the care or well-being of your sibling with cancer or other serious illnesses—or anticipate you will be in the future—you're in the right place. We're here to give you actual, practical tools to help you find your footing, talk about the hard stuff when you're ready, and process all of this at your own pace.

*Throughout this guide, the term *teen siblings* refers to siblings, siblings-in-law, cousins, and other extended family members or young caregivers between the ages 13~18.

**While a lot of this guide focuses on cancer, the term "other serious illnesses" refers to any severe, life-changing health condition—including complex chronic diseases, severe genetic disorders, major heart conditions, or sudden traumatic injuries.

About this guide

This guide was developed entirely by Sibling Society. While we've made every effort to ensure the information in this guide is accurate and up to date, it should be noted this resource is not a substitute for professional advice. Note that the insights and coping strategies outlined in this guide are grounded in the real, lived experiences of siblings whose brothers or sisters had serious illnesses within their own families. They are intended for peer-support and educational purposes only.

We are always looking to improve our resources to better support our community. Should you have any suggestions, edits, or feedback regarding this guide, please email us at siblingsociety2024@gmail.com

Sibling Society

Founded by a sibling whose younger sister was diagnosed with leukemia, Sibling Society is a registered nonprofit organization in Ontario dedicated to supporting, empowering, and informing siblings of children with cancer, so they can move forward in their changing role with confidence and strength. We provide peer support counseling, mentorship programs, and community events to help siblings process their feelings and experiences by forming a deeply connected community. Visit siblingsociety.org for more information.

What Your Brother or Sister May Be Feeling

When someone is going through treatment, a lot is happening that you may not be able to see.

Your brother or sister might be spending more time at the hospital, taking medications, missing school, or dealing with side effects that make everyday activities harder. Even if they don't always talk about it, they may be having lots of feelings about what's happening.

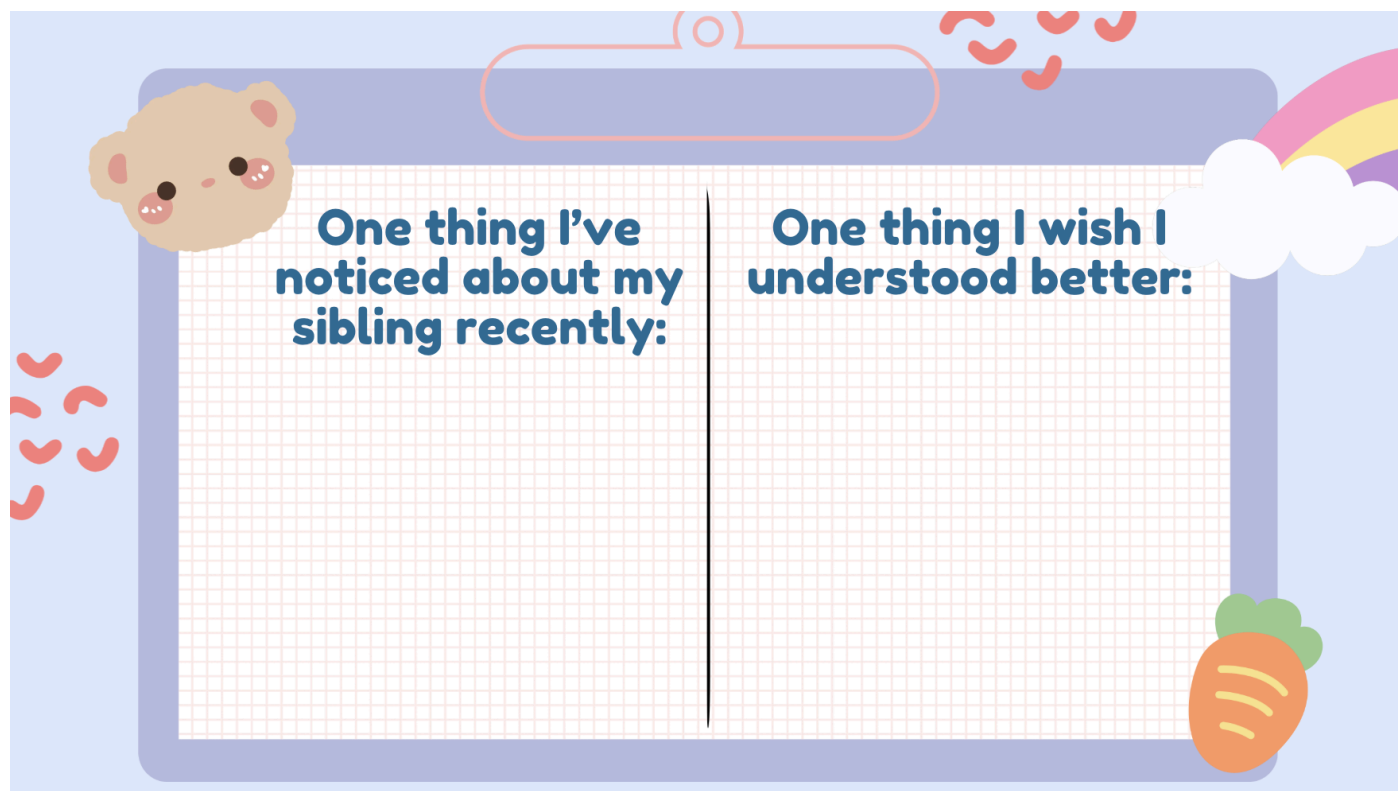
Here's something important to remember: ***You don't have to guess exactly how your sibling feels.*** Every person experiences illness differently. But understanding some of the feelings they might be having can help you be more patient, supportive, and connected.

You may even notice that some of these feelings sound familiar. It's completely normal for siblings to share many of the same worries and emotions.

Your Sibling Might Feel.....

- Afraid. Depending on how old your brother or sister is and how they react to tough situations, they may be more or less afraid of their treatment. Sometimes fear looks obvious. Other times it might show up as quietness, clinginess, or frustration.
- Sad or depressed. Your sibling may miss parts of their life that used to feel normal. They might miss school, sports, friends, and regular family routines. Some days they may seem disappointed, lonely, or less excited about things they used to enjoy.
- Angry. Treatments can be exhausting, which can cause your brother or sister to be mad or grumpy. Anger sometimes comes from feelings that are hard to express, show, and manage. Chances are your sibling is angry at the disease, not at you.
- Confused. Even older children and teens don't always understand everything about their illness or treatment. Your Sibling may have questions they don't know how to ask. Sometimes they may seem fine one moment and upset the next because they're trying to make sense of everything happening around them.

Add anything on your sibling's feelings bulletin board!



How You Can Support Your Brother or Sister

You do not need to solve every problem or make everything better. Sometimes the best thing you can do is simply remind your sibling that they are not going through this alone. Here are some ideas you can try.

Help By Just Being There

One of the greatest gifts you can give is your time. You don't need a big plan or special activity. You can:

- ❖ Hang out together. Watch a movie, play a game, and listen to music together. Decorate your brother or sister's bedroom with pictures and drawings. Visit them more at the hospital and do a craft project together at the inpatient activity room. Sometimes being together without talking about illness at all can be comforting.

- ❖ Comfort one another. Just being in the same room as your brother or sister can be a big comfort. Do what feels best for the two of you. Share funny videos and talk about completely normal things in your life.

Help By Being Thoughtful

Small acts of kindness can make a big difference. Little gestures show your sibling that you're always thinking about them. You can:

- ❖ Buy a new scarf or hat. Your brother or sister might like a new hat or cap if they lost their hair during treatment. Get a matching one for yourself, too!
- ❖ Be patient. Your brother or sister may be cranky or even mean to you. As bad as you feel, your brother or sister is probably feeling even worse.
- ❖ Make them a playlist, bring them a favorite snack, or leave a note on their pillow.

Help Them Stay Connected

Being away from school, friends, and activities can feel lonely. You can help your sibling stay connected by:

- ❖ Go for a walk together. If your brother or sister feels up to it, take a walk together around the hospital, or go for a walk at a nearby park.
- ❖ Help your brother or sister stay in touch with friends. As your sibling's friends to write notes, send their daily life, or record messages! Help your brother or sister send messages back to their friends. If your brother or sister agrees, invite friends to hang out with them.
- ❖ Share photos from your everyday life if you can't be there for them everyday.

Create Something Together

A shared project can become a special memory between just you and your siblings! You don't need to be artistic. The goal is simply to create something that belongs to both of you.

- ❖ Keep a journal together. Write thoughts or poems, doodles, or put photos in a notebook. Buy a journal book and take turns with your siblings writing in it. This can help you both share your thoughts to each other without expressing them out loud.
- ❖ Create a photo album. You can include selfies or photos, pictures of pets or places you both like, or home memories from before and during the treatment. Organize them by themes and add short captions!
- ❖ Make a scrapbook. Mix your writing, drawing, and objects all in one place! Add drawings you make for each other, photos or printed images, stickers or small decorations, or anything about you and your siblings.

Anything else you can think of? Make your own list here:



One Last Thing

You don't have to be the perfect sibling.

You don't need to know exactly what to say.

You don't need to fix everything.

The fact that you're reading this and thinking about how to support your brother or sister already shows how much you care.

Sometimes the most powerful message you can give your sibling is simply:

"I'm here."