Dealing with a Special Needs Sibling Workbook
By Patience Domowski, LCSW

It's hard to have a sibling that has special needs or behavioral issues. You likely feel like you don’t get as much attention as your sister or brother, and that their behavior affects your family in a bad way. They may even hurt you emotionally and physically. They may do some scary things. Or have scary medical procedures happen to them like surgery. They may look or act differently than most kids and they probably get alot more attention too.

This booklet is going to help you work through those feelings. You are not alone. It's normal to feel this way. It's okay. Let’s figure out how to help get your needs met too. This workbook is for you. You can keep it private. It’s a good idea to share it with a therapist or your parents if you want, but not to show your sibling(s). If any questions don’t apply to you or your family, just skip them.

What’s your name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What are your sibling(s) names? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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What is the name of the sibling who has special needs/behavioral issues?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What is that sibling’s needs/diagnosis? (ex. Autism, ADHD, depression, anxiety, CP)

(If you don’t know, that’s okay, write about whatever you know): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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What are some of the symptoms your sibling has? (“symptoms” means problems/behaviors that are part of their disorder, like crying, screaming, fighting, difficulty talking, can’t hear well, can’t dress themselves, etc):

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Are there some things your sibling can’t do because of their needs, but other kids would normally be able to do? (Example: get ready for school without help, do their homework, feed/dress themselves, make friends, calm down when upset)

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What are some behaviors they do that bothers you? (example: hitting, screaming)

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Has your sibling ever hurt you? If so, how? (example: emotionally- said mean things, physically- hit really hard, etc): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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How do you feel when that happens? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Do you think your sibling tries to hurt you on purpose, or they can’t help it? Why or why not? (could be both)

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Does your sibling ever do anything “bad” but doesn't get into trouble for it?

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Or you get in trouble, even though they did the wrong thing? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Why do you think that happens? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Are your parents unfair about how they discipline? If yes, why do you think so?

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Do you think your parents should treat your sibling different from you or the same? Why? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Do you think this is fair or right? Why or why not?

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Do you siblings ever do anything really scary? (like threaten to hurt someone, or have a seizure, asthma attack, etc…)

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How did you feel when that happened? What was it like for you?

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What are some of the medical problems your sibling has? (Example: has a feeding tube, has a lot of dr’s appts, needs help walking, wears a hearing aide, strict diet, etc):

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Does your sibling look different than normal? What is different about them? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Does your sibling use any devices? (Example: wheelchair,walker, hearing aid, eye patch, prosthetic (fake) arm/leg, etc) . How does the device help your sibling? Do you know what it does for them? (If you don’t know- ask your parents, or their therapist)

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Has your sibling ever had to go to the hospital? Did you go too? Tell about that experience.

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Do you wish you had gone to the hospital? Did you want to know more of what was going on? Were your parents vague about the problem or did they tell you why your sibling was in the hospital? Which would you rather have happen? (Know more, or not know)

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What kinds of procedures, surgeries, etc have your sibling had? (if you know)

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What kinds of therapies does your sibling get? (example: OT, PT, Speech, Feeding, Vision, Learning help, Behavioral therapy/mental health, other) Do the therapies happen at your house or somewhere else?

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Do you get to participate in the therapies at all? Do you like to be included or not included?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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You might feel jealous that your sibling gets the attention from therapists and you don’t. How do you manage these feelings? Do the therapists give you some attention too? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Your sibling likely gets a lot more attention from your parents and others than you do. How do you feel about this? How do you handle it?

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Are there any special things your parents do for just you?

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Many kids with special needs go to a special school, or a special classroom at their local school. Does your sibling go to your school? Do they get any extra help or special supports or accomodations?

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How does it feel to have your sibling get extra helps that you don’t?

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Do your friends ask you about your sibling and what their special needs or issues are? If so, what do you tell them? How do you feel about this?

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Do any of your friends have a sibling or other family member with special needs?

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Do you know a lot of kids with disabilities? If yes, who do you know?

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How do you think your sibling feels about their disability/problems?

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Do you think your sibling’s special needs affects your family in a good way or a bad way? Why?

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What’s the best thing about your sister or brother?

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What’s the worst thing about them?

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What is something(or several things) you can do that your sibling can’t do?

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What is something your sibling gets to do that you don’t?

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Are there things you can do to help your sibling? Or help your parents take care of them?

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Are there things you could NOT do that would be helpful (like not teasing them for example)

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Have you gone to a program for kids with siblings with special needs? Like “SibShops” (sibling workshop on this topic), camps, or therapy? If so, tell about that program. If not, tell why you would/wouldn’t want to go:

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Who can you talk to about your feelings?

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If you can’t get the attention you need from your parents, who can you go to instead? (example: friends, teachers, grandparents, neighbors, coaches, other siblings)

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If you found out one of your friends had a new sibling that has similar problems to your sibling, what advice would you give your friend?

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What is something you wish you could tell your sibling?

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Is there anything you want to tell your parents about this topic?

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Any other feelings or concerns you want to write about?

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Draw a picture of you and your sibling: