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Outside the Square  
psychology



# Supporting Pre-School Aged Siblings of Children with ASD

Kirsty Kerr

B.B.Sc., Grad. Dip. Ed. Psych., Assoc MAPS

Psychologist

What effect does having a brother or sister with Autism Spectrum Disorder have on a sibling?

# Positive effects

- Maturity
- Self-confidence
- Independence
- Responsibility



# Positive effects



- Tolerance of difference
- Flexibility and negotiation skills
- Altruism (caring)
- Humanitarianism (sense of justice)
- Sense of closeness in the family



# Undesirable Impact

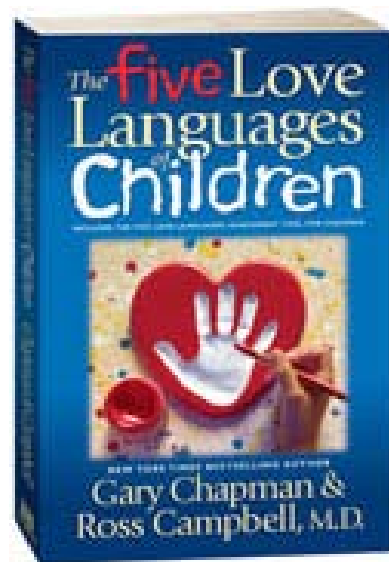
- Feeling their parents rate their siblings needs above theirs
- Resentment towards the sibling for receiving extra attention

# Strategies

- Extra reassurance and 'I love you's'
- Time and attention just for the sibling
- Some parents allow the child to miss Kinder or Creche and take a day off work to do this

# Strategies

- Speaking the sibling's 'love language'



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# Undesirable Impact

- Jealously because of all the professional people involved with the sibling



# Strategies

Find a special person for the sibling

- Family member
- Family Friend
- Sibling of another child with ASD
- Paid carer

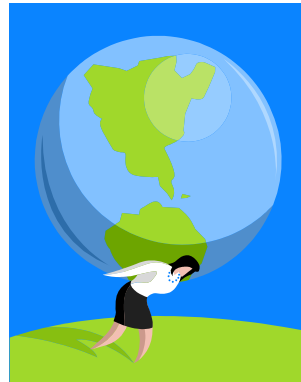


# Undesirable Impact

- Perceived demands for achievement placed on them
- Having to take on extra responsibilities within the family

# Undesirable Impact

- Not allowing themselves to be 'kids' as they are so worried about how the parent is affected by the sibling



# Undesirable Impact

- Encourage them to ask 'whose problem is it?'
- Use the 80% rule
- Encourage frivolity



# Undesirable Impact

- Embarrassment about how the sibling appears to others
- Guilt about their own skills



# Strategies: Siblings Well-Being

Help the sibling to feel a sense that their achievements are important too.

- 'Three things' game
- Achievement book



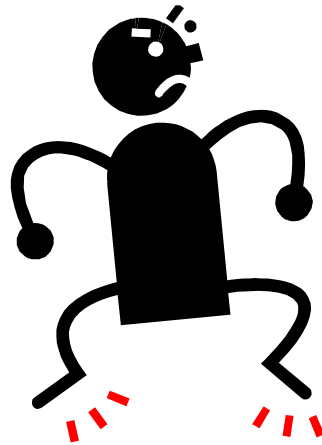
# Strategies: Siblings Well-Being

- Acknowledge the siblings' compromises where their brother or sister is concerned
- DON'T make these the only thing they are praised for



# Undesirable Impact

- Restricted social activity, because going out is difficult with the sibling





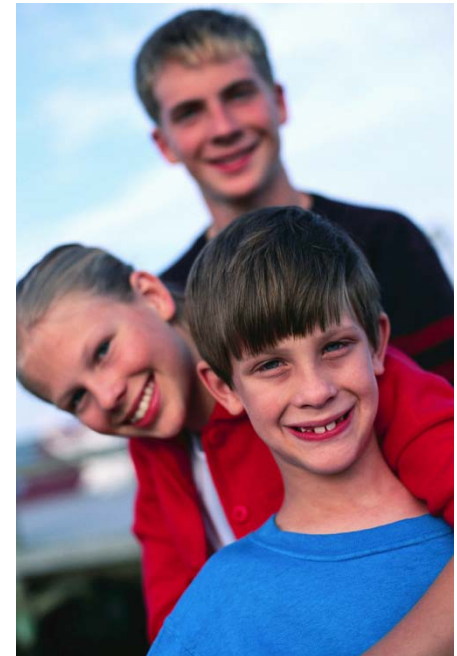
# Strategies

- Arrange social outlets, such as extra curricular activities for their skills
- Play dates as a social outlet
- Doing things separately in the family

# Undesirable Impact

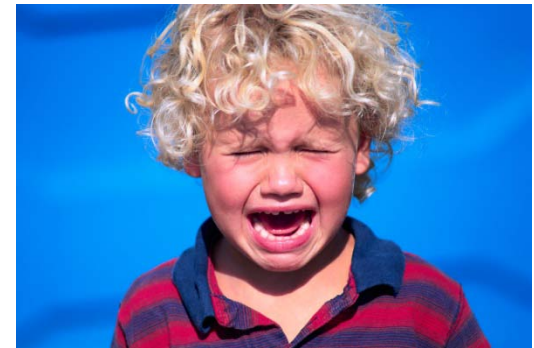
Fear, about things they do not bring up with you, such as:

- 'Can I catch it too?'
- 'Will he die from it?'
- 'Will she ever get better?'
- 'Will he ever have friends?'



# Strategies: Siblings Well-Being

Try not to trivialise an issue because the affected sibling;  
'doesn't understand',  
'can't help it'



or it is easier to make their brother or sister compromise

# Strategies: Siblings Well-Being

Listen to and empathise with the sibling's complaints about the other sib's behaviour

- Complaints box
- Grievance book
- 'Get it off my chest' time
- Writing a letter and tearing it up



# Strategies: Siblings Well-Being

Involve support from outside the immediate family to talk to if needed:

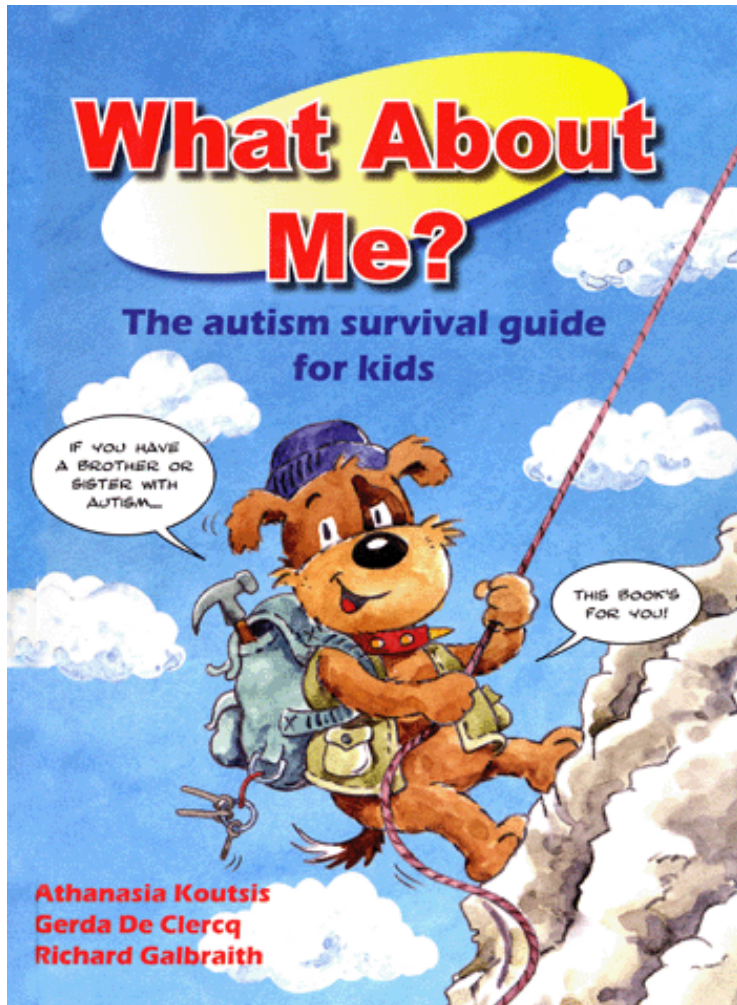
- Family friend or relative
- Professional counsellor



# Strategies: Siblings Well-being

- Ensure the siblings belongings are protected
- Ensure the sibling is protected: teach what to do for help





# Helpful Resource

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# Strategies: Siblings well-being

- Acknowledge anger or sadness about not having a 'typical' sibling relationship

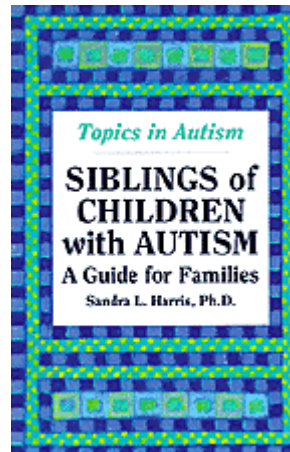


# Strategies



- Encourage activities the children can do together well
- Add structure if needed

# Suggested Resource



## Siblings of Children with Autism Sandra Harris

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# Strategies: Siblings Well-Being

- Help the sibling to understand their brother or sister's differences
- Help prepare them for questions from peers



# Understanding Sibling's Differences

Help the child to understand their brother or sister's difficulties

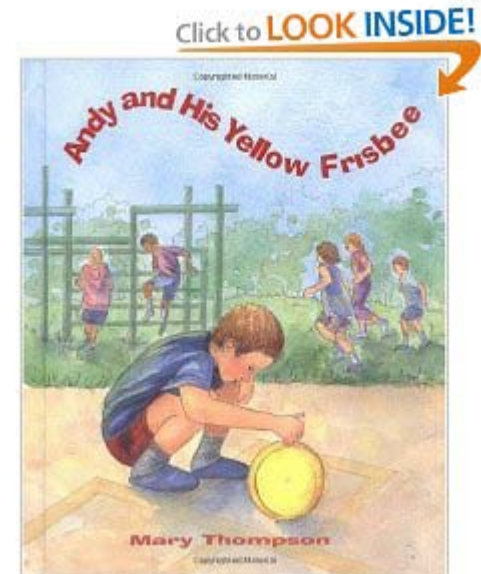
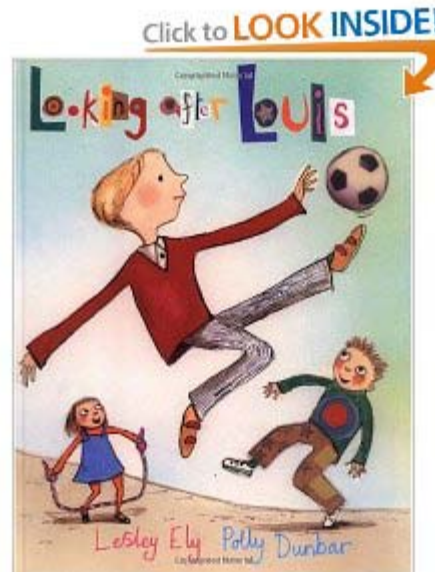
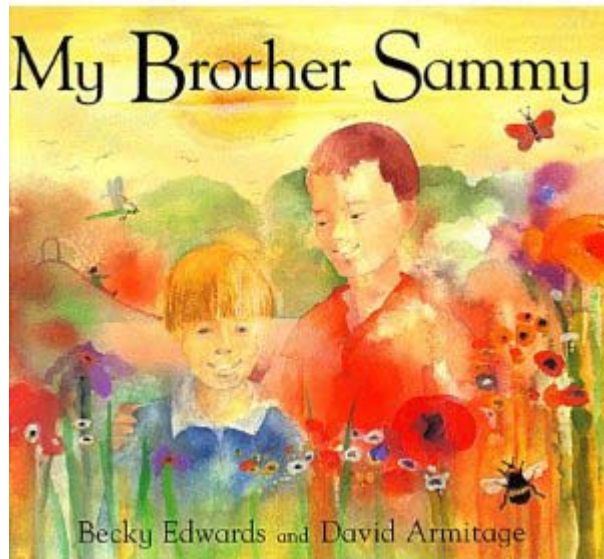
- Most parents will not be divulging the diagnosis to a preschool aged sibling
- Many parents just discuss 'differences'

# Preschool-Aged Siblings

Focus just on the obvious social, communication and behavioural things the sibling can see:

- Your brother is still learning how to talk
- Your sister *likes* to play by herself
- Your brother repeats that to calm himself
- Your sister gets sad if things change too much

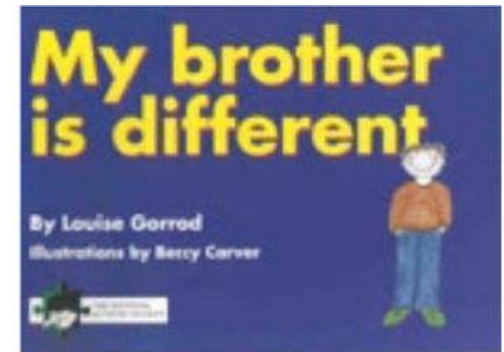
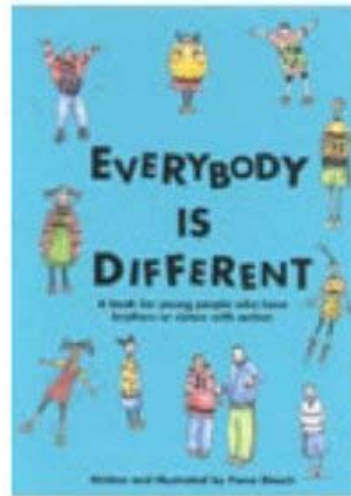
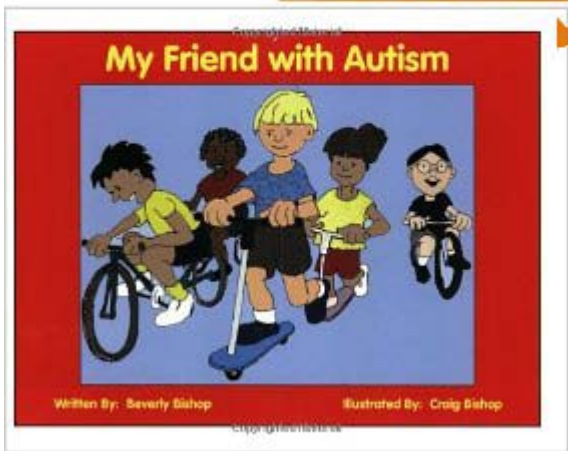
# Resources to Help Explain



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# Resources to Help Explain

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# Explaining their Siblings Differences

- Help your child prepare for questions from their friends
- The sibling might repeat some of the explanations you have given
- Teach the siblings to say 'I don't know, lets ask my Mummy/Daddy'

# Strategies for Helping Siblings

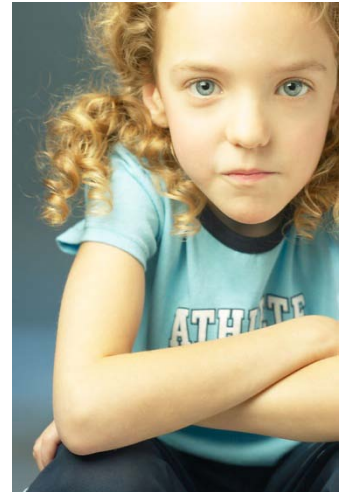
Help the sibling brief their friends about responding to the sibling with ASD:

- 'Don't use many words'
- 'Ignore funny-looking behaviour'
- 'Go to my Mummy/Daddy if you need help'

# Strategies for Helping Siblings

The sibling could also be prepared for the kind of questions other kids may ask, such as:

- What's wrong with her?
- Why does he act like that?
- Why won't she play with us?
- When will he get better?



# Resources for Helping Siblings

- Allow children to make contact with other siblings (organised groups, websites)

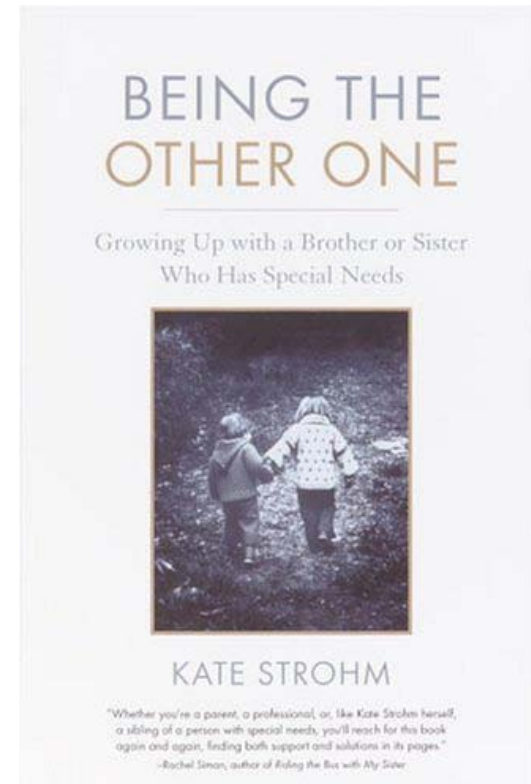
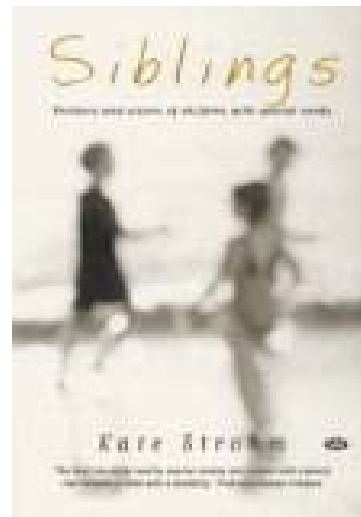
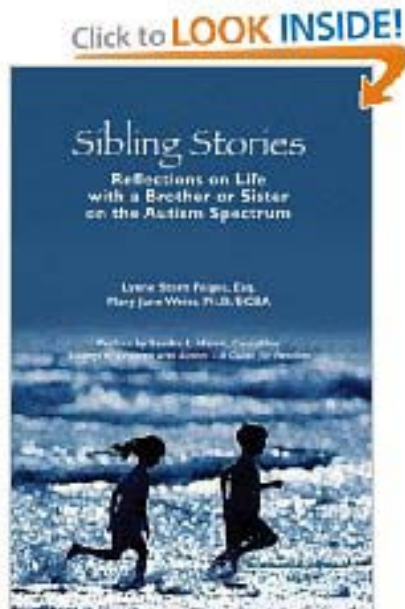


- [www.acd.org.au](http://www.acd.org.au)

Set of 3 'SiBs Tipsheets'

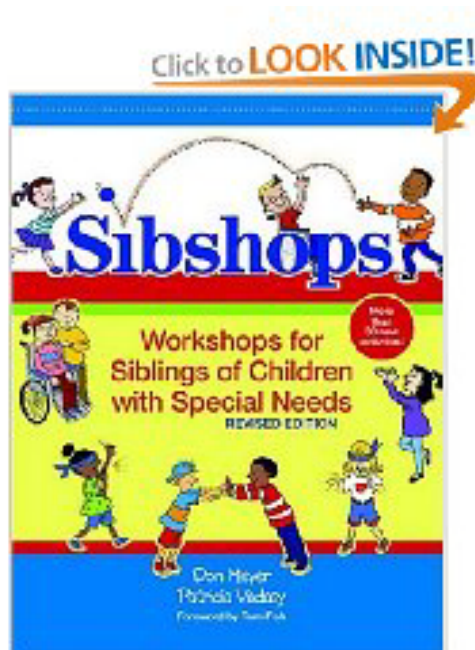
- [www.siblingsaustralia.org.au](http://www.siblingsaustralia.org.au)

# Books for Parents



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# Books for Professionals



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# Summary

- Understand the positive, as well as the negative effects on the sibling
- Open lines of communication with siblings.
- Acknowledge sibling's feelings, both positive and negative

# Summary

- Help the sibling understand their brother or sister's ASD
- Prepare them for questions from peers
- Acknowledge sibling's achievements
- Take time to be with the sibling and meet their needs

# Any questions?



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