

Siblings of children with life-threatening or life limiting illnesses can face a number of challenges, yet this is a group that is often unacknowledged as needing specific support. It is essential that their needs are recognised and addressed as part of a family-centred approach.

Siblings may have poor psychosocial outcomes in general and specifically, emotional problems, behavioural problems, academic difficulties, adjustment issues, peer-related difficulties and low self-esteem.

A number of common feelings and experiences described by siblings of children with life-threatening illnesses include:

- **Guilt;** feeling they might have caused the illness through something they did wrong, about being the healthy one, or guilt about their feelings towards their sibling or parents.
- **Worry;** about whether they will become ill like their sibling, whether their sibling may die or return to hospital, concern about the family's financial situation, their parents' emotional wellbeing, or pressure to be the 'good', 'easy' or 'able' child.
- **Resentment;** including a sense of unfairness and disappointment about the extra attention and time devoted to their sibling, or the limitations imposed on the family due to their sibling's illness.

Sense of loss and isolation; feeling different from peers who have healthy siblings, sad that they cannot have the same type of relationships or isolated when their sibling has a hospital admission.

- **Embarrassment;** in relation to their sibling's differences, appearance or behaviour.
- **Responsibility;** increased independence due to parents' preoccupation with caring for their sibling, or their own caregiving responsibilities towards their sibling.

Contact your local CF office

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How to help

- Provide a creative, fun and safe environment.
- Explore the child's understanding of the human body, illness and their sibling's condition.
- Express feelings about having a brother or sister with a life-limiting illness, and its implications.
- Identify and share strategies for coping with difficult feelings and situations.

Siblings of children with CF are considered young carers, and support is also available through your state Carers Association.

Useful Resources

www.carersaustralia.com.au/about-us/contact/

www.kidshealth.org

www.siblingsaustralia.org.au

www.kidshelp.com.au

www.siblink.org.au

www.siblingsupport.org/connect

www.livewire.com

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