

SUPPORTING NEUROTYPICAL SIBLINGS IN SPECIAL-NEEDS FAMILIES

A GUIDE FOR CHURCH LEADERS AND MINISTRY VOLUNTEERS:
UNDERSTANDING “SHADOW SIBLINGS”

3 Key Ways to Support Neurotypical Siblings

1 Create a safe space for feelings.

- Let them know church is a safe space to talk.
- Validate and acknowledge their feelings:
 - Don't judge, blame, or downplay their emotions.
 - Thank them for being honest.
- Avoid rushing to “fix” their problems.
 - Remind them:
 - Their struggles matter too.
 - No one expects them to be perfect
- Churches can reduce isolation by simply listening and affirming their experience.

2 Encourage their own identity and growth.

- Don't make them the default caregiver during church events.
- Allow them to be typical kids and explore interests, talents, and spiritual gifts.
- Reassure them that it's okay to do things their sibling cannot.
- Remind them that God wants them to develop and enjoy their gifts.
- Help them access church opportunities.
 - Camps, retreats, Bible studies
 - Provide transportation if needed.
 - These opportunities offer:
 - Spiritual and personal development
 - A much-needed break from caregiving responsibilities

3 Let them know they are seen.

(Recognize them as more than just a “sibling of...”)

- Celebrate their accomplishments, individuality, and personal struggles/dreams.
- Speak life into their hearts:
 - “You are seen.”
 - “You are important.”
 - “You are God's masterpiece.” (Ephesians 2:10)
- Remind them:
 - God has a unique plan for their life.
 - Even their challenges can be part of His purpose.
- Walk with them and watch them grow into amazing individuals.

4

Final Encouragement

Let's commit to seeing, supporting, and discipling these incredible “Shadow Siblings.” They are not just bystanders—they are part of God's beautiful plan.