Sibshops

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

1. What are Sibshops?

Sibshops are fun events for children and youth ages 6+. The program is open to those who are siblings of brothers and sisters who have special health care needs. "Special health care needs" includes anyone with a medical concern, such as cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy or cystic fibrosis; a developmental disability, such as Down Syndrome, a low IQ, or autism; or any other chronic disability or health condition.

Sibshops meet once a month in Chittenden County during the school year. Events are co-facilitated by Vermont Family Network and the Howard Center with support from the Vermont Department of Health: Children with Special Health Needs. Each get-together includes activities, games, crafts, food, Sibchat, and lots of fun!

2. What do parents like about Sibshops?

Parents know that siblings will have the longest-lasting relationship with their brother or sister –- a unique relationship which changes over time. At Sibshops, sibs openly share their joys and challenges, and even brainstorm ways to handle different situations. Parents, who may sometimes feel like they aren't devoting enough time to siblings, especially like that Sibshops are fun outings just for sibs.

3. Why do children like Sibshops?

It's fun! Sibs may be meeting another sibling of a child with special health care needs for the very first time in Sibshops. Sibs make new friends with other brothers and sisters who "know" what it's like to be a sibling. They do activities, play games, share food, do crafts, laugh, and make suggestions for future Sibshops. Sibs have an opportunity to talk about, and to listen to, others' concerns related to being a sibling of a child with special needs, in a supportive non-judgmental environment.

4. Who developed Sibshops?

The [Sibling Support Project](#), founded in 1990, was the first national program dedicated to the life-long and ever-changing concerns of millions of brothers and sisters of people with special health, developmental, and mental health concerns. Sibshops are part of this Project. Vermont Family Network has been trained in the Sibshop model and has been facilitating Sibshops for more than twenty years! The Sibshop curriculum is used throughout the United States and Canada, and in Japan, New Zealand, Argentina, Iceland, Ireland, England, Italy, and Turkey. There are more than 500 Sibshop groups around the world.

5. How do I register my child for Sibshops?

If you're registering for several events, please use the Registration form on the VFN website. If you're signing up your child for one event, you can send an email to Jamie.Rainville@vtfn.org or call her at or (802)-876-5315 or 1-800-800-4005 x243.

6. How can I make sure I receive all the Sibshop updates?

You can ask Jamie to add you to our Sibshop email distribution list. You can also join our Vermont Sibshops closed Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/groups/VermontSibshops/

7. Can I invite my child's friend to Sibshops?

Sometimes a child only feels comfortable attending Sibshops if they can bring along a friend. We get that, so let's discuss further if that's the situation with your child. We'll try to be as flexible as possible so everyone's needs are met.

8. My child is afraid to come to the first Sibshop alone. Can I stay with them?

Yes, first-timers, especially those who are younger, may be comforted by a parent who stays nearby for the beginning of Sibshop or longer as needed.

9. My child doesn't really want to talk about their brother or sister's special health care need. Is that okay?

Absolutely! There is no pressure for children to share any information beyond their comfort zone. Facilitators create a safe environment where feelings are acknowledged. Sibshops follow a wellness model and are not designed to be therapeutic.

10. My child is older and not interested in attending Sibshops but would like to connect with other siblings. Are there other options?

Yes, the [Sibling Support Project](#) hosts [on-line groups](#) for teen and adult siblings.