

Identifying Feelings



Growing up with a sibling on the autism spectrum can bring pride, love, confusion, frustration, worry, fear, guilt, and joy, often all at the same time. Siblings may struggle to name these feelings or may hide them to avoid adding stress to the family. Helping them identify their emotions and being understanding is an important part of their safety, wellbeing, and long-term resilience.

When siblings can recognize and talk about their feelings:

- They are less likely to act out through behavior or withdraw emotionally.
- They build empathy for themselves and others.
- They feel safer asking for help when feeling overwhelmed or unsafe.
- They learn that their needs matter, too.



Use Tools

Some siblings benefit from concrete supports, such as:

- Feelings charts or emotion wheels
- Drawing, journaling, or storytelling
- Rating feelings on a scale (e.g., "How big does that feeling feel right now?")

How Parents Can Help

1. Name Feelings Out Loud: Children often don't have the words for what they're experiencing. You can model this by labeling emotions you notice:

- "You seemed embarrassed when that happened in public."
- "I wonder if you felt scared when things got loud."

2. Make Space for Mixed Emotions: Let siblings know it's okay to feel more than one thing at once, such as love and anger, pride and resentment, protectiveness and exhaustion. Avoid correcting their emotions. Try:

- "You can love your sibling and still feel upset."
- "All feelings are allowed here, even the hard ones."

3. Listen Without Fixing: When siblings share their feelings, thank them and resist the urge to explain, justify, or solve immediately. Feeling understood often matters more than finding a solution in the moment. Instead:

- Listen calmly.
- Reflect back what you hear, such as "That sounds really overwhelming."

4. Reassure Them They Are Not Responsible: Siblings may feel pressure to manage behavior, keep the peace, or protect others. Gently remind them:

- They are not in charge of their sibling's emotions or actions.
- It's okay to step away and ask for help.
- Their safety and comfort are important.



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