

Siblings

Many of our families have asked for advice concerning siblings. It can be a challenge to balance the needs of a child with SPD with those of the other family members (mom's and dad's need time, too!). As caregivers, we often spend considerable time on the "squeaky wheels" of the family, sometimes to the detriment of other family members who can "handle it." Unfortunately, the more resilient members of the family can start to resent their "second class status" and begin to act out in order to get more attention. Here are some suggestions to minimize the collateral damage for the rest of the family:

- *Set aside special time for each family member*- even though the daily activity sessions may not seem like "bonding time" to you, siblings can feel slighted that they are not involved. They can even resent the fact that their sibling gets to "play" when he or she comes to the office for their session. Make time for the other children in the family, even if it is going someplace special while the "sensory sibling" is at the clinic.
- *Listen to your children*- if your children feel that there are open channels of communication, they will be willing to share their feelings. Make sure you let them air their feelings, including grievances, in an appropriate manner. If you think you are in over your head, consult a trusted individual (pastor, school counselor, therapist, etc) for insight into ways to help your children to cope with their concerns.
- *Include siblings in activity time*- there are very effective ways to include siblings into the daily activity times. The caution here is to keep the noise volume down, so the activity will be therapeutic and not overstimulating. This can be a challenge, especially with excitable little ones. Here are some examples:
 - ❖ *Plan a physical family outing.* Go for a hike (have the kids carry their own water for extra resistance), play soccer or Frisbee golf, go swimming, do some gardening or go for a hilly bike ride. If you get everyone involved, you get bonding time and physical activity all in one!
 - ❖ *Family obstacle course*- set up an obstacle course with 4 or 5 stations and start each child on a different station. If one child seems to be moving faster through the course, you can change the number of repetitions (50 jumping jacks instead of 30, for instance) to prevent one child from getting "lapped" during the course.
 - ❖ *Older siblings*- may be helpful in challenging the younger sibling to work harder. The older sibling can cheer on or do the activity with the younger child in order encourage him or her. Just make sure this stays positive for all parties involved and that the older child gets some sort of reward/praise for helping!
 - ❖ *Younger siblings*- you can incorporate younger kids into the mix by using them as weight/resistance. Have a younger sibling sit in a stable laundry basket or on a blanket and have the older child pull the basket/blanket across the floor like a sled. Another idea is to have the older sibling provide "piggy back" rides for the younger sibs.
 - ❖ *Other activities*- if you plan to occupy the other siblings with an activity while you focus one-on-one during movement time, make sure that activity isn't something your "sensory child" is dying to do (i.e. screen time). In this case, the resentment runs the other way and you will get more resistance to the workout.

Thinking through the logistics of incorporating the whole family will go a long way toward keeping the peace at home. A relatively peaceful home will cut down on the level of stimulation your child receives, which will decrease the amount of work you have to do to get and keep your child organized!