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# Helping Siblings “Redefine” the Cancer Experience

Dear Friends,

We know how hard it is to juggle your roles as parent and caregiver in “normal times”, let alone when a child has cancer. One thing that’s often most difficult for parents is to meet the differing needs of each of their children — both the one with cancer as well as the brothers and sisters. We’ve recognized this need and have prepared this [Parents Guide](#) for you — the special parents of **SuperSibs!** kids. We understand that every family situation is different, and hope that some of the tips in this guide might work for you.

Our goal is to provide a starting point of ideas, tips, conversation starters, and support methods for your “super siblings” as they manage through their own unique cancer journey. We know that cancer is frightening and unpredictable... yet at the same time, you can take this experience and try to “redefine” it — finding ways to share hope, laugh, find strength and courage — and come together as a family.

We believe that when a child is diagnosed with cancer, EVERYONE in the family needs healing. At **SuperSibs!**, our goal is to do all we can to support the often forgotten siblings — so they can heal, emotionally, as well. Please use this tool to help your family fight cancer together.

With hugs and hope,

Your friends at **SuperSibs!**

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*Over the last year and a half, I have been so concerned for my other children. The older ones have carried a load far beyond their years, and the younger ones sometimes have fallen between the cracks. We’ve done the best we knew how, but I’m so thankful for people like you that help fill in those “cracks”. Bless you, bless you!!!*

**MA, SuperSibs! Mom**

## TIPS

- Celebrate *National Sibling Day* (April 10) with a special event or gathering to honor the relationship between your children. Honor your “super siblings”!
- **SuperSibs!** kids tell us they “just want more time with their parents”. We know how hard that is, yet even brief, special times alone can make a difference.
- In the absence of information, kids will imagine on their own — often the worst situations. DO inform your children honestly, on an ongoing basis, what is happening with your child’s cancer diagnosis and treatment. (Advice on age appropriate language and detail is available from your Child Life Specialist.)
- Take a walk with your well child and invite his/her questions. Many kids appreciate this special opportunity to open up and share what’s on their minds. Sometimes, fresh air helps get things out in the open.
- “Sibs” are often asked to give medical updates to friends and family. Instead, encourage loved ones to ask YOU (or a designated point person) — or create a website so siblings don’t feel caught in the middle. ([www.caringbridge.org](http://www.caringbridge.org) provides free, easy web pages.) DO write about and show pictures of each of your children!
- Encourage everyone (medical professionals, friends and neighbors) to greet and introduce siblings by their own name (not as “patient’s older brother or sister”).
- One on one, ask your children how THEY are doing. Then listen. These kids have a life outside cancer, with hopes, dreams, disappointments and thoughts as well.
- Sibs often say they’re “OK”, but they may be feeling jealousy, anger, fear, guilt, uncertainty, loneliness, grief and more — each day!. Remember that they’re on “the roller coaster”, too.

**Dear SuperSibs!**  
**Thank you for everything. When I’m sad or scared you cheer me up. Love dearly,**  
**CN, age 10**

- Encourage your hospital to hold a special Sibling Celebration Day – with games, tours, demonstrations, giveaways and opportunities to gather with kids “just like them” in a supported setting.
- Ask if your children want to help — and then offer ways in which they can get involved — sorting supplies, reading stories to your child in the hospital or arranging room decorations. Siblings often feel “insignificant”, so a meaningful role helps them feel included and important as a part of the healing process.
- Borrow a laptop computer to provide access for siblings to use in clinic and waiting rooms. Have older children instant message with their sibling in the hospital, or be in charge of a “family on-line chat” at a designated hour each evening.
- Sometimes older siblings are thrust into the “third parent” role. Beware of loading too many adult responsibilities onto these older siblings. Reach out to friends, neighbors and extended family to take on some of these extra chores instead. People DO want to help — just say YES.
- If you’re living away from home, make a special Scavenger Hunt for your sib kids in this “home away from home” — just for fun!
- Have your kids make personal videos to stay in touch with one another OR to creatively connect with their friends at school.
- Host a special “*ThankSibling*” dinner for your children. Invite them to talk about what they appreciate about each other .

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## SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM REMINDER!

Remind High School Senior siblings of children with cancer to apply for our **SuperSibs! College Scholarship Program**. See our website at [www.supersibs.org](http://www.supersibs.org) for applications and details.

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## MORE TIPS...

- Provide “pampering coupons” for your well children – “ice cream escapes”, 5 minute “kid massages”, nature walks, or “out for coffee catch-up” dates with older siblings.
- Ask friends to send frequent cards and letters to your well siblings. Personalized mail (with their OWN names) is so very important.
- It’s OK to show your children that you are feeling a variety of emotions, too. Sometimes you may even cry together. Your children will learn that all feelings are valid.
- Sign up your child for a camp especially for siblings of children with cancer.
- Let your well siblings use a digital or instant camera to take family pictures and hospital memories and make keepsake books. This can be an important means of expression for your children.
- Encourage tours of the hospital/clinic for siblings – a “field trip” can help the siblings de-mystify much of what is going on with their beloved brother or sister.
- Ask friends to buy small items at the “dollar store” or other outlet, to leave Secret Buddy gifts for your younger children.
- Encourage your children (teen and young kids alike) to write about their lives – about this experience from their own perspectives. And if they’d like, have them send their essays (or pictures) to *SuperSibs!* for a future *SibBuzz* Newsletter. Kids want to hear from other kids in their own situation, so they don’t feel so alone.
- Siblings deserve the opportunity to be heard and have help with the emotional impact of a cancer diagnosis in their family. Seeing a good therapist (a “feelings doctor”), child life specialist or pediatric oncology social worker can be tremendously cathartic and healing for your well children (and YOU, too!)

## RESOURCES for SIBLINGS

*SuperSibs!* [www.supersibs.org](http://www.supersibs.org) (866) 444-SIBS (7427)  
Free ongoing services to support, honor and recognize brothers and sisters (ages 4-18) of children with cancer.

**The Sibling Support Project / SIBShops**  
[www.thearc.org/siblingsupport](http://www.thearc.org/siblingsupport) (206) 297-6368  
Peer support and education opportunities for brothers and sisters of people with special health/developmental needs.

**Gilda’s Club / Noogieland** [www.gildasclub.org](http://www.gildasclub.org)  
888-GILDA-4-U A special place for siblings and children of all ages.

**Camps** [www.coca-intl.org](http://www.coca-intl.org) and [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org) Many camps for children with cancer also offer “sibling sessions”. Inquire about those offered in your area – or encourage your local “cancer camps” to offer special sibling sessions.

**CancerCare** [www.cancercares.org](http://www.cancercares.org) 800-813-HOPE  
Online support group bulletin boards for siblings.

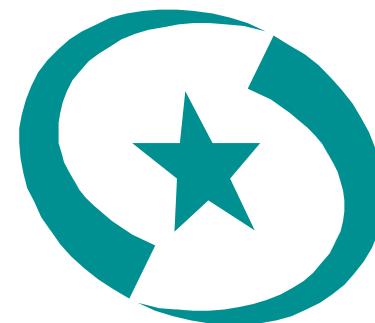
**CancerSourceKids.Com** [www.cancersourcekids.com](http://www.cancersourcekids.com)  
Website sponsored by American Pediatric Oncology Nurses for kids with cancer, siblings and parents.

### BOOKS / VIDEOS

- “**Drums, Girls and Dangerous Pie**” (super sibling fiction book) by Jordan Sonnenblick
- “**Hi! My Name is Jack**” by Christine Beall-Sullivan
- “**Life Isn’t Always A Day At The Beach**” (young child’s journal) by Pam Ganz
- “**A Day With Dr. Waddle**” by Center for Basic Cancer Research
- “**What is Cancer, Anyway? Explaining Cancer to Children of All Ages**” by Karen Carney
- “**Chemo Crusader and the Cancer Fighting Crew**” by Melodie Homer
- “**Kathy’s Hats; A Story of Hope**” by Trudie Krishner and Nadine Westcott
- “**Little Tree; A Story for Children With Serious Medical Problems**” by Joyce C. Mills
- “**Kids Tell Kids What It’s Like to Have a Brother / Sister With Cancer**” (CancerVive video)

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# SuperSibs! Guide for Parents



## SuperSibs!

A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization to honor, support and recognize brothers and sisters of children with cancer.

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