

SuperSibs!

June 9, 2009

Filed under [Disease Specific Sites](#), [Hope, Inspiration & Support](#), [Links to Online Resources](#)

Support for Siblings of Children with Cancer

If you're the parent of a child with cancer, the challenges you face are myriad and overwhelming. One of the issues that many parents encounter is how to best help their other children manage the changes within the family and process the emotional toll of a sibling's cancer diagnosis. Many kids grieve the loss of "normal" life and favorite activities that sometimes come to an end as attention and resources are directed toward the child who is sick. They might experience fear, isolation, guilt, insignificance, stress and anger. And ultimately, they may face the tragedy of losing a sibling to cancer.

As the mother of a pediatric cancer survivor, *SuperSibs!* Executive Director Melanie Goldish knew the struggles of a family facing a childhood cancer diagnosis. She had also recognized a gap in support services for families: "While our family struggled to help our ill child survive, despite our best efforts, we watched helplessly while our other son felt insignificant, afraid and ignored. It is tremendously draining to attend to all the needs of the child with cancer, understand all the medical information and make decisions on treatment, let alone find the energy necessary to be fully present with the other children as well." In response to her own experience, Goldish founded *SuperSibs!* in October, 2002, to "support and honor the brothers and sisters of children diagnosed with cancer."

SuperSibs! has made it its mission to support the siblings of the more than 12,000 children who are diagnosed with cancer each year and to "draw out the greater and important lessons that may benefit these children later in their own lives." The services that they provide, which serve children between the ages of 4 and 18, were created with the idea that *SuperSibs!* would "meet these children where they are."

The organization sends support tools through the mail, including support guides, tokens of recognition, cards, age-specific newsletters and information about events where representatives from *SuperSibs!* will be on hand to recognize and celebrate siblings. Other programs in development include *SuperSibs!* journals, *SuperSibs!* chat rooms, a Sib2Sib video and a buddy call-in program. All services are provided at no cost to families, and in 2005 over 2,650 children from across the United States and Canada are benefiting from the services that *SuperSibs!* provides. For more information, visit the *SuperSibs!* website: www.supersibs.org, or call 1-866-444-SIBS (7427).

"As parents we have struggled to support and recognize our daughter Audrey and her dealing with her brother's cancer. As a father I all too often see myself failing to honor and encourage Audrey. But, in the last few weeks Audrey put up her SuperSibs! certificate, and it has reminded me how special she is, to take some special time with just her and to cherish each day with her the same as I do with her brother who has cancer."

-Thor (SuperSib parent)

"SuperSibs! encourages me to become visible."

-Amanda, 12

"I feel proud of myself for being a good brother like holding her hand when she is taking her medason."

-Chase, 7

"I love to hear that I am not alone. Thank you so much for making me feel like I'm a real person."

-Isabelle, 11

Ten Things YOU Can Do to Help a Sibling from *SuperSibs!*

Following are ten simple but rewarding ways that friends and family can support siblings of children with cancer:

1. Introduce them by their OWN name (not as “Jimmy’s brother or sister”).
2. Ask the siblings how THEY’RE doing—and then REALLY listen. (Don’t always ask them for the medical report on their brother or sister. These kids want a life outside of cancer, too!)
3. Offer to free up the parents so they can spend special time with the sibs alone. Many siblings feel abandoned and devastated because they have little alone time with their mother or father.
4. Send fun mail addressed to the siblings—individually, by name!
5. Invite the siblings to be a part of fun activities with your family.
6. Offer to drive the siblings to and from the hospital for a visit with their family, who might not always be able to manage the commute.
7. Remind the siblings that they’re not alone. Many kids in their situation feel angry, jealous, guilty, afraid or forgotten. Encourage the sibling to reach out to someone who will be a good, special support person—maybe YOU!
8. Express your pride in the siblings’ own accomplishments. Tell them how special THEY are.
9. Encourage the sibling to write a story or draw a picture that helps them communicate the feelings they are experiencing. Finding outlets for their emotions can be very therapeutic.
10. Refer them to *SuperSibs!* www.supersibs.org or 1-866-444-SIBS (7427)