



*The following description of Sibshops is adapted from SIBSHOPS: WORKSHOPS FOR SIBLINGS OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS (Donald J. Meyer & Patricia F. Vadasy, 1994, Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company). For more information on how to start and become a registered Sibshop, contact the Sibling Support Project. Phone: 206-297-6368; Email: donmeyer@siblingsupport.org; Website: [www.siblingsupport.org](http://www.siblingsupport.org)*

**What are Sibshops?** For the adults who plan them and the agencies that sponsor them, Sibshops are best described as opportunities for brothers and sisters of children with special health and developmental needs to obtain peer support and education within a recreational context. They reflect an agency's commitment to the well-being of the family member most likely to have the longest-lasting relationship with the person with special needs.

However, for the young people who attend them and the energetic people who run them, Sibshops are best described as *events*. Sibshops are lively, pedal-to-the-metal celebrations of the many contributions made by brothers and sisters of kids with special needs. Sibshops acknowledge that being the brother or sister of a person with special needs is for some a good thing, others a not-so-good thing, and for many somewhere in between. They reflect a belief that brothers and sisters have much to offer one another--if they are given a chance. The Sibshop model intersperses information and discussion activities with new games (designed to be unique, off-beat, and appealing to a wide ability range), cooking activities, and special guests who may teach participants mime, how to juggle or, in the case of one guest artist who has cerebral palsy, how to paint by holding a toothbrush in your mouth. Sibshops are as fun and rewarding for the people who host them as they are for the participants.

Sibshops seek to provide siblings with opportunities for peer support. Because Sibshops are designed (primarily) for school-age children, peer support is provided within a lively, recreational context that emphasizes a kids'-eye-view.

Sibshops are not therapy, group or otherwise, although their effect may be therapeutic for some children. Sibshops acknowledge that most brothers and sisters of people with special needs, like their parents, are doing well, despite the challenges of an illness or disability. Consequently, while Sibshop facilitators always keep an eye open for participants who may need additional services, the Sibshop model takes a wellness approach.

**Who attends Sibshops?** Originally developed for eight-to thirteen-year-old siblings of children with developmental disabilities, the Sibshop model is easily adapted for slightly younger and older children. It has been adapted for brothers and sisters of children with other special needs, including cancer, hearing impairments, epilepsy, emotional disturbances, and HIV-positive status. Sibshops have also been adapted for use with children who have lost a family member. Children who attend Sibshops come from diverse backgrounds including suburban communities (e.g., Bellevue, Washington; Springfield, Massachusetts; Tallahassee, Florida), urban communities (e.g., Detroit, Washington, D.C.), rural communities (e.g., Wyoming, Iowa), and communities with unique cultural heritages (e.g., Alaska, New Mexico, Hawaii, South Central Los Angeles).

**Who sponsors Sibshops?** Any agency serving families of children with special needs can sponsor a Sibshop provided it can financially support, properly staff the program, and attract sufficient numbers of participants. However, we strongly recommend agencies working together to co-sponsor a local Sibshop (this important topic is further discussed in the Chapter 5). We have found that Sibshops are well within the reach and abilities of most communities. They are not expensive to run, and logistically are no more difficult to coordinate than other community-based programs for children, such as Scouts or Camp Fire.

**Who runs Sibshops?** We believe Sibshops are best facilitated by a team of service providers (such as social workers, special education teachers and professors, psychologists, nurses) and adult siblings of people with special needs. At the very least, the team of facilitators will need to be knowledgeable of the disability or illness represented, possess a sense of humor and play, enjoy the company of children, and respect the young participants' expertise on the topic of life with a brother or sister with special needs. Qualifications for Sibshop facilitators are further discussed in Chapter 5.

**What is the optimal number of participants for a Sibshop?** Sibshops have been held for as few as 5 children and as many as 45. Around a dozen children, with at least two facilitators, is a comfortable number.

**When are Sibshops offered?** Usually Sibshops are offered on Saturdays, often from 10 AM until 2 PM. This allows ample time for games, discussion and information activities, and making and eating lunch. Of course, Saturdays from 10 until 2 will not be ideal for all families or communities. Each community will need to determine the best day and length for their Sibshop, as further discussed in Chapter 5.

**How often are Sibshops held?** Depending on the needs and resources of the community, Sibshops may be offered as frequently as weekly (as with a 1 1/2 hour after school program) or as infrequently as yearly (as with an all-day Sibshop that is a part of an annual conference for families from around the state or nation). Generally, Sibshops are presented monthly or bimonthly.

Sibshops may be offered in a series (e.g., five Sibshops, meeting once a month, with one registration). Offering Sibshops in series can provide a stable group that can form an identity during the months they are together. However, it can be difficult for some participants and families to commit to a series of dates due to interference with other activities. Sibshops may also be offered as stand-alone events (e.g., bimonthly meetings with separate registrations). The stand-alone events offer families flexibility, but participants will vary somewhat from Sibshop to Sibshop.

### ***What are the goals of the Sibshop model?***

- *Goal 1: Sibshops will provide brothers and sisters of children with special needs an opportunity to meet other siblings in a relaxed, recreational setting.*
- *Goal 2: Sibshops will provide brothers and sisters with opportunities to discuss common joys and concerns with other siblings of children with special needs.*
- *Goal 3: Sibshops will provide siblings with an opportunity to learn how others handle situations commonly experienced by siblings of children with special needs.*
- *Goal 4: Sibshops will provide siblings with an opportunity to learn more about the implications of their sibling's special needs.*
- *Goal 5: Sibshops will provide parents and other professionals with opportunities to learn more about the concerns and opportunities frequently experienced by brothers and sisters of people with special needs.*

### ***Sample Sibshop Schedule***

10:00 Trickle In Activity: Facetags!	11:50 Lunch prep
10:20 Introductory/Peer Support Activity: Strengths & Weaknesses	12:00 Lunch: Super Nachos!
10:45 Recreational Activity: Knots	12:20 Lunch clean up
10:50 Recreational Activity: Lap Game	12:30 Peer Support Activity: Dear Aunt Blabby
11:00 Recreational Activity: Stand Up!	12:55 Recreational Activity: Push Pin Soccer
11:10 Recreational Activity: Group Juggling	1:15 Recreational Activity: Hog Call
11:30 Recreational Activity: Triangle tag	1:30 Peer Support Activity: Sound Off
11:40 Recreational Activity: Sightless Sculpture	1:55 Closure