



## The Sibshop Standards of Practice

A simple web search for "Sibshop" or even "Sib Shops" results in literally thousands of hits. In addition to the wonderful community-based Sibshops that are being run in almost every state and in countries from Argentina to New Zealand, Sibshops are increasingly being offered as part of state and national conferences and as an adjunct to parent support groups throughout the US and elsewhere.

While we are truly pleased that there is such interest in the model, we need to protect young sibs by making sure that when parents send their children to a Sibshop, they are sending them to a program that is true to the spirit and goals of the model.

To this end, we have worked with long-time Sibshop facilitators in drafting Standards of Practice for programs wishing to become a registered Sibshop and use the (trademarked) Sibshop name, a "sound-alike" name (e.g., "Sib Shop") or the Sibshop logo. We are grateful to the members of the Sibshop Standards of Practice Committee for helping us with this important project.

Please make a copy of the Standards of Practice for each adult facilitator of your Sibshop program and extra copies for any staff members who may join your program. Please review the Standards with the other Sibshop facilitators and administrators, and be sure to register your Sibshop online as discussed at the end of this document. If you have questions along the way, please do not hesitate to write or call.

Thank you, in advance, for taking the time to work through this document and thanks for understanding the need for high standards in our efforts to provide brothers and sisters with peer support and information.

One final note: As a Sibshop facilitator or administrator, you likely offer Sibshops in addition to many other responsibilities. Still, you and your colleagues find time in your busy schedules and lives because you care deeply about brothers and sisters and their concerns. Local providers like you--who are making a difference in the lives of sibs on a daily basis--are our heroes. We can't thank you enough for what you are doing for the brothers and sisters in your community. Please let us know how we may support your important work.

All the best,

Emily Holl, Director  
Sibling Support Project  
16120 NE 8th Street Bellevue, WA 98008  
425-362-6421  
emilyholl@siblingsupport.org



Sibling Support Project

## **1. What Sibshops Are—and Are Not.**

On the very first page of *Sibshops: Workshops for siblings of children with special needs*, Sibshops are described this way:

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 often 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, for 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, offbeat, and appealing to a wide ability range), cooking and art activities, and special guests...Well run, 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 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.

Sibshops should also never be confused with childcare. Sometimes, agencies wish to offer Sibshops concurrently with parent support meetings. While this “two ring” approach is acceptable, agencies will need to add a “third ring”: childcare for the children who have special needs *and* for the typically developing siblings who are either not in the target age range or simply do not wish to be a part of your Sibshop.

Sibshops, therefore:

- should be decidedly fun to attend;
- provide peer support and information within a recreational context;
- may be “therapeutic” to attend but are not therapy, group or otherwise;
- utilizes an approach that emphasizes wellness; and
- should never be considered childcare.

## **2. Endorsing the Goals of Sibshops.**

As described on pages 4 & 5 of the Sibshop curriculum, Sibshop goals are:

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.

These goals will drive the activities of your Sibshop. Although most Sibshops do an excellent job with goals 1 – 3, goals 4 and 5 are too often overlooked and shouldn't be.

Brothers and sisters will have a life-long and ever-changing need for information about their sibs' disabilities and the services they receive. As a peer support *and* education model, Sibshops are a marvelous opportunity to provide participants with kid-friendly information about a wide range of topics from guest speakers, tours, discussions, etc.

If we hope that parents will attend to the needs of their typically developing children, we will need to inform them of sibs' life-long concerns. If we wish to create systemic change that assures that sibs are on agencies' radar screens and in their working definition of "family," it will require that we educate our colleagues and advocate for sibs' concerns.

## **3. Referring Children When Sibshops Are Not the Right Approach.**

Most, but not all siblings of children with special needs will be well-served by Sibshops' lively mix of fun, peer support, and information. For some children, however, Sibshops may not be the right approach. These children may not be comfortable in groups or they may prefer to get peer support and information in other ways (e.g., listservs, books, or informal opportunities). Other children will have needs that go beyond what a Sibshop can reasonably provide. As mentioned in the above description of Sibshops, facilitators will need to keep an eye open for participants who may need additional services. Your Sibshop team of facilitators and appropriate administrators should know--in advance of a problematic situation—people and agencies in your community who might be able to help a child (and family) not being well-served by your Sibshop effort.

#### **4. Reporting Worrisome Information and Behavior to Parents and Appropriate Agencies.**

To the extent possible, Sibshops attempt to give participants a safe place where they can openly discuss the “good and not-so-good” aspects of life with a sibling who has special needs. In order to assure that they can speak freely, facilitators, as a rule, will not specifically divulge what participants discuss during a Sibshop with parents. (Facilitators, however, are encouraged to discuss the *general* topics that participants discussed during parent meetings.)

On rare occasions, however, children may reveal information that will need to be shared with parents or, in extreme cases, with appropriate agencies. Before such contact is made with either parents or agencies, the concern should be discussed with the entire Sibshop team. Your Sibshop’s team should be aware—in advance of a problem--of your state’s rules regarding to mandated reporting.

#### **5. Making Sibshops Available For Families Who Cannot Afford To Pay.**

It is reasonable to ask parents to pay a fee for their children to attend a Sibshop. Most Sibshops far cost less than childcare would for the same amount of time. Fees can help offset costs associated with running a Sibshop. Perhaps most importantly, fees help insure that parents bring their children to the Sibshop that facilitators have worked so hard to make rewarding.

However, a significant effort should be made to assure that Sibshops are available to families who cannot afford the set fee. On the registration forms of many Sibshops is a statement similar to the following: “A limited number of Sibshop scholarships are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Check here if you’d like your child considered for a Sibshop scholarship.” On the same form, other parents who do not have money woes can be given an opportunity to contribute to the Sibshops scholarship fund.

#### **6. Family Involvement in Sibshops.**

Ideally, at least one of your Sibshop’s facilitators will be an adult sibling for the reasons mentioned on page 75 of the Sibshop curriculum. If this is not possible, seek a parent who can offer advice, provide a family perspective, and help you spread the word about your program. Good word of mouth among families is critical to drawing children to your Sibshop. Family involvement--as well as Goal 5 of the Sibshop curriculum--will also be achieved by hosting at least one meeting per year for the parents of the children who attend your Sibshop. These meetings may be held concurrently with your Sibshop and can be informal discussions of why parents enrolled their children in Sibshops, Sibshop goals and activities, and general topics discussed by Sibshop participants.

#### **7. Involving Sibs in the Selection of Sibshop Activities.**

The brothers and sisters who attend your Sibshop should be given some say about Sibshop activities. This is especially true for Teen Sibshops. Seek their feedback about activities they liked and disliked and ideas that they have for recreation, discussion, and informational activities. The Sibshop curriculum is not so regimented that it can’t accommodate bright ideas from the young people who attend them!

## **8. Evaluation.**

At least once per year, your Sibshop should plan on “checking in” with both the young siblings who attend your Sibshop as well as their parents. Use or adapt the evaluation forms found on pages 101-103 of *Sibshops*. These evaluations are easy to administer and will provide your team with valuable feedback.

## **9. Seek Appropriate Facilitators.**

Based on years of conducting programs for siblings, we believe that Sibshop facilitators should share some varied core skills. As described in detail on pages 75-77 of *Sibshops*, it is strongly desired that Sibshop facilitators:

- Have a working knowledge of the unique concerns and opportunities experienced by brothers and sisters of children with special needs.
- Have personal or professional experience with people who have special needs and with their families.
- Be familiar with active listening principles.
- Have experience leading groups, preferably groups of children.
- Convey a sense of joy, wonder and play.
- Be available to meet at the times and dates identified by the planning committee.
- Be somewhat physically fit.
- Appreciate that the Sibshop participants, not the facilitators, are the experts on living with a brother or sister with special needs.

Review pages 75-77 with members of your team to make sure that your team of facilitators embodies these qualifications. In certain instances, allowances can be made for one team member lacking a particular skill if it is compensated by another team member who possesses that skill. For instance, your Sibshop may have a team member who is gifted at leading group discussions but has a physical disability that makes it impossible for her to pitch lively recreational activities. Her difficulty might be compensated by a team member who may not be especially good at leading group discussions but is highly skilled at leading recreational activities.

## **10. Training.**

All Sibshop facilitators are strongly encouraged to attend a two-day Sibshop training offered by the Sibling Support Project. It is the single best way to get “up to speed” on sibling issues and learn what Sibshops are all about.

These trainings are best when hosted in the community where the new Sibshop is to be created. As training includes a Demonstration Sibshop, these two-day events are a great way to kick off a local Sibshop and educate parents, service providers, and future Sibshop facilitators about siblings’ life-long concerns.

When hosting a training is not possible, you may attend a Sibshop training offered elsewhere as an alternative. To learn where Sibshop trainings are being held, consult the Sibling Support Project’s website or contact the Sibling Support Project directly.

Although attending training from the Sibling Support Project is preferred, local Sibshop facilitators who have attended training by the Sibling Support Project may train new staff at their own agencies. Facilitators trained this way are, in effect, “second-generation” trainees. In order to avoid a photocopy-of-a-photocopy-of-a-photocopy phenomena, Sibshops run by second-generation trainees may not train new Sibshop facilitators, even at their own agency.

As discussed in Standard 2 (Endorsing the Goals of Sibshops) community-based Sibshop facilitators are encouraged to conduct awareness-level workshops on Sibshops. However, they may not train others on how to run a Sibshop model at regional, state, or national venues without specific, prior permission of the Sibling Support Project.

### **11. Membership in SFF, the Sibshop Facilitator Forum.**

The Sibshop Facilitator Forum (SFF) is a closed Facebook group **just** for facilitators from registered Sibshops. SF is an excellent forum to meet others running Sibshops and share ideas, challenges, and stories of your successes. It is also the easiest way for the Sibling Support Project to communicate with Sibshops across the world. To be a registered Sibshop, at least one member of your Sibshop staff must belong to the Sibshop Facilitator Forum. To subscribe, simply visit <https://www.facebook.com/groups/SibshopFacilitatorForum/> or search for “Sibshop Facilitator Forum” in the Facebook search bar.

### **12. Enriching the Sibshop Curriculum.**

Each week Sibshop facilitators come up with novel activities that are not in the pages of the *Sibshops*. To encourage sharing the wealth and enriching the Sibshop curriculum, we ask that each Sibshop program submit at least one and preferably three activities to [activities@siblingsupport.org](mailto:activities@siblingsupport.org). These may be recreational (includes new games, crafts, art and cooking projects), discussion, or information activities. Sharing will give all Sibshops a rich array of activities to choose from. Contributors will always be acknowledged!

### **13. Appropriate use of Sibshop name and logo.**

Registered Sibshops may use the Sibshop name and the Sibshop logo, but the name and logo must be used correctly. Please note that it is “Sibshop” and never “SibShop” or “Sib Shop.” The Sibshop curriculum is copyrighted and the Sibshop logo is a trademark. Consequently, the Sibshop logo may not be altered in any way without prior permission of the Sibling Support Project.

#### **14. Registering your Sibshop.**

To use the Sibshop name and logo, your program must be a registered Sibshop. Luckily, registration is easy, quick, and now is completed online. Please note: All Sibshops must complete a one-time online registration—even those Sibshops who have previously registered through the mail.

During the online registration site, you will:

- Indicate that you have completed the necessary requirements to become a registered Sibshop;
- Indicate that you agree with the Standards; and
- Provide us with contact information about your Sibshop program.

Once you register online, we will post key contact information about your Sibshop on our website's online directory. This information will assist the hundreds of parents who visit the Project's webpages seeking a local Sibshop for their children. Please note: it will be your responsibility to make sure that the contact information we have for you is current. Following registration, you will be provided with instructions on how to make updates on the information we have about your program.

To register online, please visit: <http://tinyurl.com/sibshop-registration>