

“My Brother is a Class-A Brat”

AS THE PARENT OF A CHILD WHO HAS ADHD, you are well aware of the tremendous amount of energy it takes to meet his or her needs. Most of your day seems to be consumed with meeting those needs, with constant redirecting and endless reminders. But what about the needs of your child who doesn't have ADHD?

Doesn't he or she deserve attention, too? In dealing with the chaos and tension of the home environment, parents who themselves are overwhelmed often forget, or don't have time for, the struggling child who doesn't have ADHD. Perhaps that child has a lot of coping to do, too; after all, he or she is living in the same home. Before parents can effectively offer their help, however, they need to understand some of the issues that may be plaguing their child who doesn't have ADHD. Then they can confront those issues and give that child the help and support he or she needs.

Living with a brother or sister who has ADHD can be quite challenging. As one sibling of a youngster with ADHD told me recently, “My brother is a class-A brat! He gets all the attention around our house. Even when I speak up about something that's on my mind, he's always there to butt in and interrupt me. My parents don't seem to understand, and besides, they're always too busy chasing him around the place.”

Unfortunately, we often miss the fact that our other child may be in fact feeling angry inside. That anger could be directed toward you or toward the sibling with ADHD. The child who doesn't have ADHD may hold the anger



inside for a long time, feeling hopeless that the situation will ever change. It just isn't fun to watch constant chaos around the house, seeing one's parents being exhausted and distracted, overwhelmed by the constant needs of their child with ADHD.

If you find your “neurotypical” child often being irritable, there could be anger beneath the surface that is triggering it. Sometimes this irritability may mask underlying depression or repressed feelings of sadness. This same child can also feel a lot of anxiety from stress and chaos in the home. There also could be feelings of guilt in the form of shame or discomfort over the negative feelings directed toward the sibling or parents. Resentment can set in: “Why don't my parents spend equal time with me?” This resentment often surfaces because of a difference in discipline toward the child with ADHD. He or she seems to get away with more while the sibling who doesn't have ADHD is expected to be “perfect.” Because that child perceives an imbalance

of attention, everything seems “unfair” and “unequal.” Confusion over his or her role in the family can itself be overwhelming: “How do I deal with the chaos around our house? Should I just appear to be the happy peacemaker or should I strike back? Is there really anything that I could possibly do to change the situation?”

The child who doesn't have ADHD can feel a lot of embarrassment about his or her sibling's behaviors. It is possible that the behaviors of the child with ADHD are such that the sibling without ADHD would not want to invite friends over to the house.

Often parents won't take a child who has ADHD out into certain public places for fear that the child's behaviors will be problematic. For this reason, the sibling who doesn't have ADHD also misses out on going to certain places and doing family things that would otherwise be fun.

Another way that the sibling who doesn't have ADHD may react is by trying to get more attention, even if it is negative attention. After all, he or she learns that inappropriate behavior gets more attention! Some kids will even regress to a more childlike state, thinking that that will get more attention from parents. Neglecting schoolwork or other responsibilities may be another way that the sibling gets the “attention” of the parents.

You may not recognize these patterns in your child who doesn't have ADHD. When you do, it is important to take steps to make your relationship with that child better, and at the same time, boost your child's self-esteem. The following steps will encourage your success in building loving family relationships for a lifetime.

- 1 Give your child unconditional love.** Regardless of the way he or she has handled the situation at home, your child will feel valued and accepted if you love him or her unconditionally.
- 2 Be sure to acknowledge and validate your child's feelings.** Be a good listener, even if the things that he or she



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Tips for Parenting Your Child Who *Doesn't* Have ADHD

is saying are difficult to hear.

You may not have been aware that your child who doesn't have ADHD has felt like he or she is "second-rate," and this may trigger guilt feelings inside you. Try to put yourself aside and empathize with your child. It is important to see things from his or her perspective.

- 3 Embrace your family.** Those relationships are so important. In spite of the needs of your child who has ADHD, plan a special time each week with just the sibling who doesn't have ADHD whenever possible.
- 4 Praise your child without ADHD often,** celebrating his or her special gifts and talents. Reward him or her for good behavior often.
- 5 Find a good coach** to help you through the chaos and overwhelm.
- 6 Learn as much about ADHD as you can.** Join support groups such as those sponsored by CHADD. Explain the facts about ADHD to your child who doesn't have the disorder in terms that he or she can understand.
- 7 Model good communication and problem-solving skills** for all your children.
- 8 Address fairness in discipline and consequences.** Address also the fact that one sibling may need more attention at times.
- 9 Make your home as comfortable for everyone as possible.** Plan ahead for family get-togethers or when friends visit. The best way is to anticipate problems ahead of time.
- 10 Parents, by all means, take care of your needs too!** Get enough sleep and exercise regularly. ●

