

Sometimes I get anxious



Having a sibling with a disability is a unique experience.

It can have some really positive aspects like teaching you compassion and empathy for others which are key leadership skills. It can also have some not so great aspects. Sometimes this could mean missing out on things you enjoy because your brother/sister can't join in or your parents don't have time. Maybe you have responsibilities for caring for your brother/sister that can feel like a burden at times.

Many people in your situation will experience a

range of different feelings, some of which can be difficult to manage. One of those feelings which can seem quite overwhelming at times is anxiety. Not everyone will experience anxiety, but if you do it's important to know what it looks like and how to manage it.

What is anxiety?

Our experience of anxiety can be both similar and different to others. It can affect how we feel in our body, our emotions, the way we think about ourselves, others, the world and it can also affect what we do.

PHYSICAL

- Shaking
- Sweating
- Tense muscles
- Butterflies in your stomach
- Feeling breathless
- Racing heart
- Not feeling hungry
- Headaches
- Stomachaches
- Restless and fidgety
Can't keep still or concentrate on a task

EMOTIONAL

- Getting upset easily
- Feeling angry and grumpy without having a reason why
- Afraid of making mistakes
- Feeling like you have to be perfect all the time
- Worrying about things that are far away in the future, or things that may not even happen
- Worrying about family or friends getting sick
- Worrying the worst is going to happen
- Not enjoying activities you used to enjoy

BEHAVIOURAL

- Prefer to spend a lot of time on your own than with friends or family
- Finding it difficult to go to school, not going to classes, or not being able to concentrate in class
- Avoiding social situations
- Constantly feeling like you need approval from parents and other people
- Developing fears and phobias
- Trouble sleeping - difficulty falling asleep, waking during the night or waking early
- Nightmares
- Changes in eating behaviour – eating more or less than normal
- Thinking you have to be perfect all the time



Reach out to others

Tell your mum or dad, or another adult you trust when you may be struggling with anxiety.

Make time for yourself

Schedule time in your day or week that is just for you. That could be joining a sports team, hanging out with friends, or reading a book by yourself. Whatever the activity is, make sure it's something you enjoy.

Make special time for your sibling

Take some time in your day or week to spend some special time with your sibling. Think of something you both enjoy and could do together. It could be watching a movie, playing a game, going for a walk or reading to your sibling.

Helpful thoughts

Use helpful thoughts to fight those anxious and negative ones. For example, let's say you are worrying about an upcoming presentation at school. A negative thought might be: "I get so nervous speaking in public; I know people are going to laugh at me and think I'm stupid". A helpful thought in this situation might be: "I'm probably better at public speaking than I think. Most people will be nervous, and last time I did a presentation everybody clapped for me".

Calming activities

When you feel anxious, try doing an activity that you know makes you feel happy and relaxed. That could be going for a walk, watching a movie or drawing a picture.

Calm breathing

Calm breathing is a great way to take our focus off anxious thoughts and can fight some of the physical symptoms of anxiety too. It is especially great because you can do it anywhere and no one even knows you are doing it.

Place your hands on your stomach so your fingertips are just touching. Take a slow breath in through your nose so the air fills up your tummy, watch your fingertips move apart. Hold on for a second or two and breathe out slowly through your mouth. Do this five times or until you feel your breathing slow down.

Tip: It's a good idea to practice this breathing for five minutes twice a day. You can also practice Paced Breathing. This is where you breathe in to the count of four, hold, and breathe out for the count of six. Your out breath is always longer than your in breath.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is about being present in the moment and not worrying about tomorrow or thinking about what has happened in the past. It involves becoming more

aware of your thoughts, feelings and body sensations (e.g. breathing, muscle tension) as you experience them. There are lots of mindfulness exercises you can practice, you can find some examples at: kidshealth.org

Knowledge

Sometimes not having the information we need to understand a situation can lead to unnecessary anxious thoughts. If you have questions about your sibling's disability, ask your parents. Tell them how important it is for you to understand what is happening with your sibling, and what the future may look like.

Physical health

A healthy body helps keep your mind healthy too. Eat healthy, move your body often, and make sure you are getting enough sleep at night.

No one is perfect

Often we set standards for ourselves which are so high they can either not be met, or can only be met with great difficulty. Start telling yourself some positive, realistic statements, for example "Nobody is perfect", "All I can do is my best", "Everyone has a bad day sometimes".



One on one time

Having some special time with your parents that is just for you is really important for your wellbeing. Think of an activity that you could do with a parent. It might be getting them to take you to an afterschool activity, or you could play a board game together.

Social support

It is important to have people in your life you can count on. Even having one good, supportive friend can make a huge difference. Reach out to people! You might like to join a support group with other people your age who are dealing with similar issues.

Parent to Parents offers a range of sibling support programs including workshops, fun activities and camps. They are designed specifically for siblings and are run by siblings who also have a brother or sister with a disability. They are a great way to meet up with other people in similar situations, build leadership skills, and discuss the feelings and experiences having a sibling with a disability brings.

Writing it down

Sometimes it's hard to communicate our feelings. Writing them down is a great way of processing our thoughts. Whether you share them or not is up to you, but sometimes just writing things down helps us feel less anxious.

Helpful resources:

- Computer program for youth designed to help with depression, anxiety and stress: sparx.org.nz
- The low down: thelowdown.co.nz (includes 24/7 helpline and webchat)
- Siblings Australia: siblingsaustralia.org.au (lots of information and links to Facebook group for teens with a disabled brother/sister)
- Siblings UK: sibs.org.uk (lots of useful information and links)
- Parent to Parent sibling support Facebook group: facebook.com/groups/sibsupportnz



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