Parent Session

Sibling Relationships
and
Twice-Exceptional Children

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PROJECT2EXCEL

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Discussion Questions

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Suggested Pre-Readings


- Birth order is discussed in this chapter. Do the general “rules” of birth order apply in your family, or does your child’s additional exceptionality change the dynamic?
- How do you think having a twice-exceptional child changes the cooperation or competition environment the authors discuss?


- The author offers detailed examples of how she and her husband intentionally helped their children develop respect for one another. Are you able to distill your expectations for your children’s sibling relationships into a single goal? How do you think this helped the author?
- Which of the authors parenting “structures” do you already have in place in your family? Which do you want to try?


- Warshaw recommends having a neurotypical child do a task with his non-dominant hand to help him understand the difficulty a twice-exceptional child may have with certain tasks. This article, also included in the Advocacy and Self-Advocacy module, may help your NT child better understand your 2X child: Paquette, Deborah. (2005). Stones across the River: an Analogy on the Twice-Exceptional Child and School. [http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/stones_across_river.htm](http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/stones_across_river.htm)
- The idea of “special time” is also mentioned in the Webb book. How do you carve out time for your neurotypical children?

Lavoie, Rick. (2005), Advice to Kids with Learning or Social Problems About Siblings. [http://www.ldonline.org/article/Advice_to_Kids_with_Learning_or_Social_Problems_About_Siblings](http://www.ldonline.org/article/Advice_to_Kids_with_Learning_or_Social_Problems_About_Siblings)

- Taking a different twist on the subject, the first half of this article is directed toward the child who has special needs. Will this help you discuss sibling stress with your 2X child?
- The second half of the article is aimed at helping parents encourage communication and understanding among siblings. Any new ideas for you here?

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# Discussion Notes

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Discussion Questions

1. Do your children know about and understand each other’s strengths and challenges?
2. If so, how did you explain their differences?
3. If not, when and how do you think you will address the subject of learning differences with them?
4. Do your twice-exceptional child’s challenges
   a. Alter the balance of time spent with each child in the family?
   b. Cause parental stress that affects the family dynamics?
   c. Create expenses that mean sacrifices for the rest of the family?
5. Do your children exhibit the usual birth order traits for their places in the family?
6. How does your twice-exceptional child’s unique needs affect these birth order traits?
7. Are your children competitive with each other in any area, e.g. music, math, sports, etc., or do they gravitate toward different activities and academic areas?
8. Do your ideas about what you want your children to be good at affect the amount of importance you place on their participation and success in activities and academics?
9. How do you balance your goals for your children with their varied strengths?
10. In the Azarva article, the author talks about her strategies for building respect between siblings with differing strengths. How do you encourage your children to be respectful of each other?
11. Azarva mentions that they do not share information about one child’s academic performance with the other sibling, while the Warshaw and Lavoie articles recommend helping your children understand their differing strengths and emphasizing effort. Are these two ideas compatible?
12. How can you keep your focus on each child’s process, rather than the products the schools emphasize and other parents brag about?
13. What does fair mean in your family?
14. Can you be a fair parent without giving equally to both children, whether you are giving of time, help, expensive classes, assistive technology, etc.?
Below, we’ve taken ideas from online resources, one general parenting and one for parents of autistic kids, and added, in italics, ideas for using these strategies with your twice-exceptional child.

Sibling Rivalry: Five Strategies to Reduce It, by Suzita
http://playfightrepeat.com/2010/12/sibling-rivalry-five-strategies-reduce/

1. **Run ‘em like puppies.** Exercise is a great emotional temperature modulator for kids and adults alike. Sometimes, however, twice-exceptional kids need certain types of activities or sensory input to help them manage their overexcitabilities. Swimming can be very calming for kids who love water, yoga helps really engage all the large muscle groups for kids who need to work and stretch those muscles, and swinging helps some kids mellow out. Martial arts and fencing are great activities for developing mental focus and muscle control.

2. **Make playing together a privilege.** This can take more finesse in a family with a twice-exceptional child. In order to make playing together feel like a privilege instead of a sentence, find activities that are really appealing to your children that they can only do together, and only if they keep calm and get along.

3. **Give young children the tools they need to play well together.** This is a great reminder to be persistent. All children take time to learn skills like sharing, fairness, and cooperation. Twice-exceptional children often require additional time and coaching, and possibly a completely different approach to learning social skills. Don’t hesitate to try new things, such as social stories http://www.thegraycenter.org/social-stories and social thinking http://www.socialthinking.com/, but remember that all the work you are doing to help your children get along with other people will sink in eventually, even though it seems as though you are beating your head against a wall right now. Your child will be able to use the good skills and tools you are giving him now when he is ready for them, so keep up the good work!

4. **Encourage different interests among your kids.** As the author of this blog says, it can be very tough to schedule for a variety of interests. This idea of fostering different interests may be even more important for twice-exceptional children, to give her a sense of mastery over an area she is passionate about, rather than feeling second best in an area siblings share.

5. **Spend one-on-one time with each child daily.** Such an important idea, and sometimes so hard to implement, special time is consistently a top piece of advice from parenting gurus. Remember that frequency of time spent with each child individually is more important than the length of time spent. 10 minutes a day works better than an hour once a week. And it doesn’t have to be an event--even a grocery store run can count as one-on-one time.
Sources of Stress for Siblings, by Sandra Harris, Ph.D.

This post focuses on sibling of children with autism, but the advice given can be applied to other exceptionalities and sibling relationships, as well.

1. **Embarrassment around peers.** Twice-exceptional children sometimes exhibit behaviors that call attention to themselves, their parents, and their siblings. Public outbursts, impulsivity, strong emotional reactions, or poor social interaction skills can all be trying for parents, but may be embarrassing for siblings. Help your other children understand the reasons behind the behaviors that they find embarrassing, and be sure to emphasize empathy and tolerance for differences. When a person in a grocery store makes negative comments about your 2X child, use this as a teaching moment—why was that person wrong to say what they did, and what would we do differently? Let your children see you showing compassion and respectfulness for other families of intense children.

2. **Jealousy regarding amount of time parents spend with their brother/sister.** Again, special time is the key here. Make use of your support system to ensure that you have one-on-one time with each of your children. Don’t forget some time with your spouse or parenting partner, and some time for yourself!

3. **Being the target of aggressive behaviors.** Help your neurotypical children learn to recognize the signals of a meltdown, and remind them to get out of the way until the storm blows over. Also, try to define triggers for outbursts and be sure your children know that “pushing buttons” is unacceptable. This won’t stop siblings from using their knowledge of what drives each other crazy, but consistent and logical consequences can help them think twice before “button pushing”.

4. **Trying to make up for the deficits of their brother/sister.** This is a more serious issue when one child is severely challenged, but it can still occur with gifted and twice-exceptional siblings. Revisit the Strengths module http://www.stthomas.edu/project2excel/OurResources/default.html for ideas on how to acknowledge your twice-exceptional child’s struggles, while rejoicing in the unique strengths this child is developing in addition to, and as a result of, his additional exceptionality. Your children will have different patterns of strengths and abilities, but thanks to the gifted side of the 2X equation, those strengths will be significant. Work from the strengths.

5. **Concern regarding their parents’ stress.** This is another great excuse to make time for yourself. Think about running a marathon—you start out fresh and ready to tackle the challenge, enjoying the scenery, feeling strong. As the day progresses, the sun gets hotter, your muscles are tiring, until all you can think about is the next step and the next. If you take a short break in the shade, have some food and drink and maybe a short nap and a stretch before continuing the run, your perspective broadens once again. Raising children is a long marathon. Make time for yourself, and do it for the sake of your children.

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Food for Thought
Below are excerpts from a variety of online articles and blogs.

**The New Science of Siblings**, by Jeffrey Kluger

“From the time they are born, our brothers and sisters are our collaborators and co-conspirators, our role models and cautionary tales. They are our scolds, protectors, goads, tormentors, playmates, counselors, sources of envy, objects of pride. They teach us how to resolve conflicts and how not to; how to conduct friendships and when to walk away from them. Sisters teach brothers about the mysteries of girls; brothers teach sisters about the puzzle of boys. Our spouses arrive comparatively late in our lives; our parents eventually leave us. Our siblings may be the only people we'll ever know who truly qualify as partners for life.”
http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1209949,00.html#ixzz1xcAXKLA5

**Sibling Studies: The good, the bad, and the contradictory**, by Teresa Foden

“Siblings spend their childhood "sharpening their teeth" on each other. And as hard as it may be to watch, it's all in the name of a crucial developmental outcome: producing self-sufficient adults capable of weathering most of life's challenges. However, stir an ASD child into this volatile mix, already characterized by magical thinking, interdependence, and sometimes intense rivalry, and you have...well...nobody really knows.”
http://www.iancommunity.org/cs/articles/sibling_relationships

**Gifted and Nongifted Siblings**, by Nancy Robinson

“A common misconception maintains that children with a gifted brother or sister have difficulties. The belief holds that the parents bestow attention, praise, and resources on the gifted child to the detriment of the other child, that the children are inevitably competitive, and that the brilliance of the “star” blinds everyone else to the gifts of the “nonstar.” The trouble is—it isn’t true.”
http://www.tip.duke.edu/node/703

**Handling Sibling Rivalry**, from the Child Development Institute

“Don't dismiss or suppress your children’s resentment or angry feelings. Contrary to what many people think, anger is not something we should try to avoid at all costs. It’s an entirely normal part of being human, and it’s certainly normal for siblings to get furious with one another. They need the adults in their lives to assure them that mothers and fathers get angry, too, but have learned control and that angry feelings do not give license to behave in cruel and dangerous ways. This is the time to sit down, acknowledge the anger (“I know you hate David right now but you cannot hit him with a stick”). and talk it through.”
http://childdevelopmentinfo.com/parenting/sibling_rivalry.shtml

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