

Personal Reflection

Honesty: It is tough to be a sibling of someone with a disability. Here are a few thoughts of what it is like to be a sibling of someone with “special needs,” with a disability that is not commonly known.

Worry: When I was growing up, I worried for myself and for my sister. In elementary school, I anxiously awaited for the day when they were going to find something “wrong” with me. When I made a mistake in class or stumbled over my words I was sure I must have some undiagnosed disorder. Although I knew that her syndrome was due to her chromosomes, I was still afraid to be seen as weird or different.

Realizing there is no such thing as “normal.” Every family has their own unique difficulties, but I couldn’t see that when I was young. I did not know any other family like ours so I thought we were different than everyone else. The only person who understands the sibling situation is my other sister. I don’t have any close friends who have a sibling with a disability, and sometimes I wish I did so I could have others to talk with. As I got older I realized that every person and family has unique struggles and victories.

Frustration and Anger: When we were younger, my sister always got whatever she wanted! In reality, she didn’t, but as the oldest sister watching her get attention from everyone, it felt like it sometimes. The frustrating part now is that she is still learning how to consider other people’s feelings. She doesn’t care or understand that her words and attitudes can hurt, but she is gradually learning. Sometimes she is forced to spend time with me, so I value the times when we do talk. It feels “normal” to talk about life, boys, school, and friends. She is maturing and we

have a friendship now, which means she asks to borrow my clothes and will spend more time with me.

Pride: I have pride and am protective of my youngest sister (and my other sister too!). I rejoice with her when she wins Special Olympics medals and my heart breaks for her when she sobs about lacking friendships. Whether it's surgery, academic struggles, or friends, my heart hurts too when she has to fight battles that are harder for her than for most people. Furthermore, my sister may not understand the value of money, but she can negotiate her way out of doing any homework! She understands 22q and will explain it to anyone who asks. She competes in Special Olympics only to add gold medals to her collection and increase her bragging rights. She is witty and a complete trash-talker if you challenge her to a Wii game.

It is not all happiness and inspiration to have a sibling with a disability. I compare my hardships to hers and to everyone else who has more problems than me. This perspective is both beneficial and problematic because I usually have a positive attitude to not complain about the little things in life, but also hesitate to display any negative emotions. I am slowly learning that it is okay to be upset and angry sometimes.

I do believe that being a sibling of someone with a disability has developed and shaped characteristics that led me to my career choice, speech-language pathology. I have learned patience, how to accept differences in others, and that public meltdowns happen sometimes. I have always been my sister's advocate, back to when she did not have her voice, to the present when she can definitely speak for herself. As a future speech-language pathologist, I will be an advocate for other people with disabilities as well!