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Missouri Schools for the Severely Disabled
P.O. Box 480
Jefferson City, MO 65102-0480

Archie Derboven,
Superintendent

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STAFF HIGHLIGHTS

Internal Communique • Missouri Schools for the Severely Disabled

Siblings of Kids with Special Needs

Article provided by University of Michigan Health Systems,
www.med.umich.edu/yourchild/topics/specneed.htm

What's the upside of growing up with a sibling with special health or developmental needs?

Siblings of children with special needs have special needs themselves. Their sister or brother with special needs will get a bigger share of attention. While having a special needs sib presents challenges, it also comes with opportunities. Kids who grow up with a sibling with special health or developmental needs may have more of a chance to develop many good qualities, including:

- patience
- kindness and supportiveness
- acceptance of differences
- compassion and helpfulness
- empathy for others and insight into coping with challenges
- dependability and loyalty that may come from standing up for their brother or sister

What kinds of difficult feelings might a sibling have?

Your child may, at times, have trouble coping with being the sibling of a child with special needs. They may have many different and even conflicting feelings. For example, they may feel:

- worried about their sibling
- jealous of the attention their brother/sister receives
- scared that they will lose their sibling
- angry that no one pays attention to them
- resentful of having to explain, support, and/or take care of their brother/sister
- resentful that they are unable to do things or go places because of their sibling
- embarrassed about their sibling's differences
- pressure to be or do what their sibling cannot
- guilty for negative feelings they have toward their sibling or guilty for not having the same problems

When parents tune in to the *individual needs of each child* in the family, they can help ease the difficulties.

What are the red flags, or signs that my child needs more help?

Sometimes the feelings can be so intense or disruptive, that a child may need professional counseling to help them cope. Meeting and talking with other kids

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Siblings of Kids with Special Needs (from page 1)

going through the same thing can also be very helpful--even if it's just online. Below, you'll find resources to help your family find connections with other siblings going through similar things.

Talk to your doctor if you see any of these warning signs:

- changes in eating or sleeping (too much or too little)
- physical symptoms like headaches or stomachaches
- hopelessness
- perfectionism
- poor concentration
- poor self-esteem
- talk of hurting themselves
- difficulty separating from parents
- loss of interest in activities
- frequent crying or worrying
- withdrawal

You can expect some degree of sibling rivalry, even when one child has an illness or developmental disability. But sometimes the rivalry crosses the line into abuse. If there is a chance the sibling relationship has become abusive, you should seek professional help. Talk to your health care provider about options.

Some possible signs of sibling abuse are:

- One child always avoids their sibling
- A child has changes in behavior, sleep patterns, eating habits, or has nightmares
- A child acts out abuse in play
- A child acts out sexually in inappropriate ways
- The children's roles are rigid: one child is always the aggressor, the other, the victim
- The roughness or violence between siblings is increasing over time

What are some parenting tips for our family?

You can help your kids better understand what having a sibling with special needs means to your family, and you can also help your kids figure out constructive and appropriate ways to express their feelings and make sure their needs are met.

- First, get the basics on *YourChild: Sibling Rivalry* <http://www.med.umich.edu/yourchild/topics/sibriv.htm>
- *What siblings would like parents and service providers to know*—from the Sibling Support Project <http://www.siblingsupport.org/publications/what-siblings-would-like-parents-and-service-providers-to-know>
- *Siblings of children with special needs*—From the NYU Child Study Center, with information about feelings, what kids can understand at different ages, and general parenting tips http://www.aboutourkids.org/articles/siblings_children_special_needs
- *When special needs spark sibling rivalry*—with tips for minimizing rivalry when one child has special needs http://www.aboutourkids.org/articles/siblings_children_special_needs

Caring for a child with special needs along with all the other demands of work and caring for the rest of the family can be very challenging. If the demands and the stress level are high in your family, it is difficult for everyone. Sometimes family counseling helps. You can also check out *YourChild: Children with Chronic Conditions*, <http://www.med.umich.edu/yourchild/topics/chronic.htm>, for tips on family coping.

Supporting Individuals with Specialized Needs

Article from *Positive Focus Fall 2012 newsletter*, published by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the University of Missouri Center for SW-PBS

http://pbissmissouri.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/MO_SW-PBS_Positive-Focus_12-12.pdf?9d7bd4

Kansas City Region: B.W. Sheperd, Missouri Schools for Severely Disabled (MSSD)

B.W. Sheperd, located in Kansas City, is a school for students with severe developmental disabilities between the ages of 5 and 21. The school supports the learning of 24 students.

A positive staff with a consistent approach to teaching social skills helps B.W. Sheperd's students learn important life skills. Led by Karen Wells, the team at B.W. Sheperd has developed innovative strategies to implement SW-PBS with this special population of children.

The team addressed the cognitive and communicative needs of their students by creating a matrix comprised of simple, succinct, and direct language. Each student is pictured demonstrating appropriate behaviors. Innovative communication devices, including hand-held recorders and task cards, assist students with communicative disabilities in stating expectations. Students earn Leopard Bucks for appropriate behavior that are spent at the school store. For every 25 Leopard Bucks spent, students earn a Paw for the Paw Wall. Once 100 Paws are earned, students vote for their choice of a school-wide celebration. Celebration choices might be a S'mores party or a school dance. A picture of their choice of celebration is hung on the Paw Wall. Staff and students are honored on a Staff and Student of the Month bulletin board. Honorees are further recognized during an end of month pep rally.

SW-PBS is helping this dedicated staff make a difference at B.W. Sheperd, where staff and students are "positive"ly ROARing!

Kansas City Region: Helen Davis School, Missouri Schools for Severely Disabled (MSSD)

Helen Davis School, located in St. Joseph, is a school for students with severe developmental disabilities who are between the ages 5 to 21 years of age. The school supports the learning of 57 students. It has earned a reputation as an excellent school and an asset to the community.

Helen Davis doesn't just settle on this reputation. Last school year, the staff decided their students would benefit from learning social skills. A Positive Behavior Support Team was created. They worked with their faculty to develop school-wide behavioral expectations with specific observable rules.

By creating a matrix that addresses all the areas of school, the entire staff is able to recognize any students who exhibit the appropriate behavior. Specific language is used to acknowledge and reinforce the behavior as well as a Husky Paw. Husky Paws have value in the school store and also add up for a special school-wide event. Students vote to determine what the special event will be. Behavior data is analyzed weekly. Problem areas give the staff the opportunity to reteach social skills or celebrate a reduction in behavior problems.

Power Up 2013 Assistive Technology Conference

The Power Up 2013 Assistive Technology Conference and Expo is April 15-16 in Columbia, MO. The conference will include nationally-known speakers on AT topics like special apps for tablets, voice recognition and screen reading software, augmentative communication devices, AT in Education, Transition, and Employment and others. There will be hands-on AT demonstrations and a chance to talk to national vendors.

The rate is \$150 for the two-day conference. The conference agenda, session descriptions, list of exhibitors, CEU info, lodging information, and online registration are available at: <http://at.mo.gov/powerup/index.html>. If you have questions, contact Kris or Brenda at moat1501@att.net, (816) 655-6700 or TTY (816) 655-6711.

Special Acres Souper Bowl

By Cheryl Doza, Building Administrator, Special Acres School

Special Acres School in Park Hills went all out to celebrate the Super Bowl. Students and staff voted to have a Soup Drive and set a goal to collect 100 cans of soup. Each classroom counted the cans daily brought by students and then carried them to the "Souper Bowl" display in the hallway. Each class worked as a team and charted the school progress. The Special Acres Souper Bowl was held February 1st.

On the day of the celebration, excitement filled the building. The day began as Matthew held the American flag while the pledge of allegiance was recited. At lunch, students selected a decorated lunch bag filled with healthy food and a drink and pretended they were tailgating in the cafeteria. After that, judges visited each classroom to determine which class had the most team spirit. Each classroom had chosen a mascot and decorated their room in the spirit of the Souper Bowl celebration. Students chanted cheers they had made up as a class; some classes even made pom poms that they used for their cheers. The judges had a hard time picking one winner since every classroom had so much team spirit, so each class won a prize.

The whole school got together in the afternoon for the Souper Bowl activities. Each class performed their cheer for the rest of the school. Miss Debbie's class was The Polar Bears. Their cheer featured posters of polar bears and words like "fight" and "win". The class had practiced in their classroom so their cheer was loud and clear. Miss Jessica's class was The Angry Birds. Jacob wore an Angry Birds t-shirt and led the cheer. Each student moved their arms as they shouted the cheer together. Miss Lynne's class was The Mighty Lions. Jerry dressed as a lion, complete with a homemade mane. He roared at the end of the cheer while his classmates waved their pom poms. Miss Carrie's class was The Weiss Owls (since Miss Carrie's last name is Weiss). Karlina had an owl on her t-shirt and she shouted "hoot hoot" at the end of the cheer. Other students held up the poster they had made as a class. All the cheers were awesome, and Miss Lynne's class won the award for the best cheer.

After the cheering, the bowling began. Students bowled one frame as their classmates watched and cheered. Some of the students used the ramp to help them roll the ball into the pins. Other students put their fingers in the holes and threw the bowling ball just like they had learned in P.E. class. The scores were added up to determine a winner and Miss Debbie's class won the award for the best bowling team. The faculty had different rules to follow as they bowled. They had to roll the ball between their legs using their left hand. They looked very funny which made everyone laugh.

The Souper Bowl concluded as the soup cans were stacked after they were counted. The students surpassed their goal by collecting 112 cans of soup and vegetables. The cans were delivered to the local food pantry. Everyone was proud to know they had helped someone who was in need.

It was a "Souper Bowl" to remember at Special Acres and teamwork made it possible!



MISSOURI SCHOOLS FOR THE SEVERELY DISABLED

Website: dese.mo.gov/se/mssd/

NOTE: If you have items of interest for Staff Highlights, please call 573-751-0706, 800-735-2966 (Missouri Relay) or forward them to Debbie Downing, Missouri Schools for the Severely Disabled, P.O. Box 480, Jefferson City, MO 65102-0480; or send an email to debbie.downing@dese.mo.gov.