



Frequently Asked Questions about Sibshops

What are Sibshops? For the adults who run them and for the agencies that sponsor them, Sibshops are evidence of their loving concern for the family member who will have the longest-lasting relationship with a person who has a disability. However, for the kids who attend them, Sibshops are pedal-to-the-metal events where they will meet other sibs (usually for the first time), have fun, laugh, talk about the good and not-so-good parts of having a sib with special needs, play some great games, learn something about the services their brothers and sister receive, and have some more fun.

Are Sibshops a form of therapy? Sibshops may be “therapeutic” for kids to attend, but they’re not therapy. Sibshops takes a wellness perspective. They’re a celebration of the many lifelong contributions made by brothers and sisters of people with special health and developmental needs.

Who attends Sibshops? Sibs, of course! Most Sibshops are for sibs of kids with developmental concerns. Increasingly, Sibshops are being offered for brothers and sisters of kids with health concerns (often at children’s hospitals) and we’re beginning to see Sibshops emerge for sibs of kids with mental health concerns. While Sibshops were developed for sibs in the 8-13 year-old age range, Sibshops (depending on the community) are being offered for sibs as young as six and for teens as well.

Who sponsors Sibshops? A wide range of agencies sponsor Sibshops: early intervention centers, school districts, children’s hospitals, chapters of the Arc, Easter Seals programs, autism societies, Down syndrome groups, developmental disabilities councils, Jewish community centers, churches, parks and recreation programs, etc. Often, local agencies work with other like-minded agencies to cosponsor one Sibshop for all the brothers and sisters in a given community.

Who facilitates Sibshops? We like to have both family members and service providers as a part of the Sibshop leadership. Parents are often the driving force in getting a Sibshop started, but they are not usually the best people to run the

Sibshops their own children attend. Still, there is plenty of behind-the-scenes work for parents to do to support a Sibshop effort. We very much like having adult sibs as Sibshop facilitators--and adult sibs tell us that they get much out of running the program. The facilitator who is a service provider will know about the special needs represented in the group and about services available in the community. Regardless of whether the facilitator is a family member or service provider, we seek certain qualities in a good Sibshop facilitator. We want them to truly enjoy the company of kids and have had experience working with kids; to be especially good listeners; and to have the ability to convey a sense of joy, wonder, and fun.

What is the optimal number for a Sibshop? We like somewhere between a dozen and twenty kids, but there are successful Sibshop programs where there are as few as five participants.

Where can I find a Sibshop near me? There are over 400 Sibshops in almost every state and countries ranging from Argentina to Iceland and Ireland to Japan. To see a directory of registered Sibshops, visit <https://www.siblingsupport.org/about-sibshops/find-a-sibshop-near-you>

How do I start a Sibshop in my community? It begins with a phone call to the Sibling Support Project at 206-297-6368. We'll discuss your interests, possibilities and the expectations we have of sibling programs that call themselves "Sibshops." There is no fee to become a Sibshop, but agencies must register their program and agree to the Sibshop Standards of Practice. The Sibshop Standards help assure that when parents send their children to a program that calls itself a "Sibshop" it is a program that reflects the goals and values of the Sibshop model.

Do you have other questions about Sibshops? If so, please write—or better yet, call us. We'd be happy to answer any questions you may have. You'll find our contact information below.

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