



Welcome to our final week of Parenting 2.0 where we look at some of the issues surrounding parenting two when one of our kids needs just a bit more than the other. Naturally there are age differences in what our kids need and typically speaking, our younger kids are the ones who need more from us, but sometimes that can be inverted or it continues for longer than in the baby years. When one child needs us much more than the other, we can feel a strong sense of guilt either because we feel we can't provide what that child needs *or* because we worry that we aren't giving enough to our other child. Our sense of fairness and justice makes us want to treat our children *equally*. They should have equal amounts of time and attention from us, but really the issue is *equity* or giving our kids what each of them needs. We naturally understand this equity when our children are young because babies need more than older kids, but when our children age and still need more, it can be really hard to keep in mind.

When most of us think about "special needs", we immediately think of one with a developmental difference or delay and these are very real issues that crop up for many families, but we also need to remember that this can include the orchid or high-needs child as well as temporary special needs like a child who is sick. In cases where the extra needs are with the older child, the sense of stress and guilt can weigh us down as it's like being pulled in two directions with feelings of failure regardless of which direction you're in at the moment. What we often forget in our struggles is that we can turn this situation around to actually build something positive for our kids. Yes, when we approach this issue of special needs as a way to understand differences, we can help build up our children's empathy for others, which is no small feat.

Hopefully by the end of this week you'll have a better understanding of how to cope with having a child (or two) who has special needs from us and how we can make this more positive for all. Let's get started.

Section 1: When a Cold is So Much More



When we think about the special needs our kids can have, one of the first that comes to mind is medical. The most obvious of these is when one of our children comes down with a cold or flu or stomach bug. They don't sleep as well, they often want to be snuggled up with a caregiver (regardless of age), and need more of our time and mental space than they usually do (no matter how much that may be). Children are not always as accommodating to the needs of their siblings and so while one is struggling, you can have the other constantly at you about the things they too need from you. You may even be told it's "unfair" or "mean" that you aren't providing for them as you are for their sibling.

Luckily these moments come and go, but go they do, and this means you can see the light at the end of the tunnel and it allows us to keep our patience and cool a little bit better. However, it's always good to be prepared. In terms of preparation, I do admit it's a lot easier if you have some ideas up your sleeve already planned for when things go up in smoke in the middle of the night as one child pukes all over you and your bed and you realize that all the plans for the next few days have gone out the window. What are some of the ways you can prepare?

1. If you can, have someone else do the activities with your non-sick child. This is obviously the best, but the hardest. Many parents aren't given sick leave from work for their kids (ridiculous) and so asking another parent to stay home (if there is one) is nearly impossible. If you have family or friends who can help, great. If not, when you start programs it can be good to have a list of some of the names of other families to call upon in these situations to see if they can take your child and vice versa when the need arises.
2. Have some high-sensory activities ready to go. Some of the more organized parents I know have bins of certain sensory activities that they keep hidden away for that rainy - or in this case, pukey - day. Make sure they require limited supervision as you can't guarantee time away from a sick child to keep an eye on your other one. If you could, the issue of special needs would be moot.

3. Have some high-energy activities in mind. If you can't get outside (likely with a sick child) then your other child will need to expend energy inside and probably lots of it. When you're not stressed out and in a panic, it can be helpful to search for high-energy activities that can be done inside that fit your child's age and make a list to have handy when you need it. It may be jumping on the bed, dancing, running around the house, building a fort, climbing on furniture, and so on. There are possibilities, but you have to determine what you're comfortable with and what is appropriate for your non-sick child.
4. Rotate toys. We talked about rotating toys last week as a means to keep the toy chaos down and another benefit is that when toys have been hidden away for a while, when they re-emerge they are often very exciting again. This means you can get a lot more of that self-directed, independent play that may have faded as your children got used to the toys that were around them.
5. Screens. Again, not for everyone, but for some families this is a saviour when a child is sick and they don't have the space to let the other child play as freely as they would like. You want to view it as temporary and saved for those times when you feel you don't have much of a choice, but a bit of an uptick in screen time won't be horrible. Alternatives include things like educational games online, audiobooks (a favourite in our home), or even just music, especially music made for kids.

Most likely we've all been there with the sick child and if you already have two you may have figured all these things out, but what if this temporary becomes a little bit more longstanding or even "forever"? Or if it's severe enough that it's not just time at home, but time in the hospital? Facing a longer-term illness often requires a shift in how we approach life.

The first issue is that of the sterile environment. Sometimes the illness is such that our kids require a sterile environment for a period of time as they get better or more generally. As you likely know, children are wonderful at carrying germs into the house and make a great point of ensuring that everyone in the family gets whatever they have decided to bring home so this is not an ideal situation for another child. If it's temporary, you can often go into strict quarantine for a time and make sure to have activities your non-sick child can do, such as going for hikes with another adult or the same types of activities listed above. Children who are too young to really notice the shift won't often be too bothered by the change and may even just be happy to be home with parents. You can use things like Facetime or Zoom to have them take part in social activities if they take to that. I also recommend having a visual countdown to when things will return to normal if you happen to know when that is so that your child can look "forward" to life going back to normal.

When the timing isn't so temporary - say you have a child who is going through chemotherapy or premature babies with health issues - full quarantine may not be possible. When it's not, you'll have to focus on minimizing the impact of your other child being around other kids. In these cases, I recommend the following:

- Awareness for the programs. First and foremost, you will need to not only notify any instructors so they can let you know if any child is sick and you can get your child right away, but write a letter to all parents. Some families will assume the school or program will do this for them, but you cannot guarantee that and when you write it, you can be as heartfelt as you need to be to ensure that your wishes are met. In doing this, you don't want to demand that no child come sick because sometimes parents don't know or simply don't have the resources to keep their kids with a stuffy nose home, but you can ask them to call the program that morning. This way, the program can call you and give you the heads up and you can choose to keep *your* child home that day. I truly believe no parent wants to be responsible for a sick child getting sicker, but we have to give them the tools to make this happen.
- Outdoor programs. Germs transmit far more readily indoors and so making sure your child is outdoors for their social times or activities minimizes the risks to you and your family. If your child cannot attend their regular programs or schools because of this, finding a good hiking group or forest school can help make up for this. An added bonus is that outdoor programs tend to have fewer children which also minimizes risk.
- Set up sanitation stations at your doors. The more you normalize this for *everyone* who comes to your house, the easier it is, but this also includes your child coming home. When hand sanitizer or masks (if they are needed) are readily available by the door, it just makes this issue of degerming as much as possible a daily reality for our kids (and for any visitors), thus lowering the risk of transmission.

The second area is time. As we've talked about so much in this course so far, one of the biggest struggles of raising two kids is the decreased time with each one. When one child is sick for a prolonged period, the time they need from us is far more and this can cause resentment from our non-sick kids as well as loneliness anger from the loneliness, and then guilt for feeling anger.

Sometimes the issues arise because we try to keep our non-sick children from realizing the degree to which our sick children are sick. We don't want to burden them so we explain things in a way that doesn't quite make them aware of the severity. As we'll talk about in the empathy section this week, it often doesn't do us well to sugar-coat things, but rather focus on what is developmentally appropriate because there is a difference. The more our kids understand, the more they can better comprehend what is going on around them and the effects on them are less. Think about a child who believes one parent is just favouring another versus one who realizes the needs of their sibling is actually much higher at the moment. Which child is going to feel better about themselves during this hard time?

Sometimes they are too young to truly understand what's going on. This can be one of the hardest issues for families of sick children because there isn't an age-appropriate way of explaining things. In these cases, it really is best if there is someone else to care for the child when the primary parent cannot and they can build that bond. This can be hard for the primary parent, but it may be that the younger child learns to see someone else as more primary during this time and that's okay. The well-being of our children is what we have to focus on during times of crisis. If there isn't someone else then you'll need

to find ways to incorporate your child into the care of your other child. If your young child is a baby, this may be easier, but if they are a bit older, it may be setting up stations in the same room so they can play while you tend to your sick child and still keep an eye on them.

Regardless of age, when time is limited, do make the most of the time you have with your non-sick child as we discussed all the way back in week 1. Making them realize how much they are loved - even when time is even more limited - is crucial to their mental health.

The final medical area is the issue of hospitalization. Now not only do we have a child who is even more sick with special needs, but our anxiety and fears will be heightened and we may have to face less time with our other children leading to that issue of guilt and stress over the effects on them.

If the non-sick sibling is old enough, your efforts are best spent trying to help them understand what is happening, turning them into allies to help the sick sibling (even if it's just something like making paintings or drawings), and making sure you get time with them to talk about things or know you miss them and are thinking of them. If you're in hospital, you can use facetime or the phone to keep in touch as you care for your sick child. You can write them notes that you'll bring home and leave for them so they know you're always thinking of them. You can take pictures of their sibling and you together wishing they were there. All the ways we've spoken of so far that help build sibling bonds and feelings of connection with you are paramount at this time.

However, if your child isn't old enough (whether or not they are the older sibling), then you can face a harder situation. Younger children can face more hardships as they don't understand what is going on and may still be nursing or co-sleeping and have that taken away. Changing their life entirely - even temporarily - is a traumatic experience for them and so we want to make sure we do what we can to minimize this impact. With younger children, consider the following:

- If you can bring them to the hospital with you, do. This is particular for babies that are still being carried everywhere. Being on you and around you - even in hospital - will be better. (Of course, not all hospitals will allow this and there may be circumstances - like a pandemic - that make it impossible.)
- Make sure you have feeding arrangements made if your child is still nursing. You may be able to ask the hospital for a hospital-grade pump if you need it. If you can, take a few breaks a day to continue to nurse your baby and have that physical contact.
- Switch out with another family member or friend that your sick child trusts (and knows and hopefully loves) so you can have time with your other child. This will be a very hard time indeed and so having some contact can be very helpful. If you can, try focusing on some sleep times as well as your child likely sleeps better with you and this can ensure they feel safe for sleep and can rest their tired bodies better, even if it's just a nap.
- Make videos for your younger child and do facetime as needed. Depending on the age of your child, facetime may work, but regardless of the age, having videos that other carers can go to

when you aren't able to be there can be helpful. Your young child will be able to hear your voice and see your face and if you are providing comforting words, it may help minimize the impact.

- Leave things that smell like you. Our children love our scent, even when we don't. I'm probably not the only parent who has had young kids burrow in my armpit at night and not move, despite the fact that I am certain this is not a fun place to be. However, scent is something we use to feel safe when we sleep and if we can leave our old clothes at home - without washing - for our kids to snuggle up to, it may help them overnight or during naps. (Note that this has to be done safely and will depend upon the age of your child. If you have a young baby, have someone bring you their sleep sacks or clothes and keep them on you to get that scent for them to wear overnight.)

I want to say that during all this time you may feel like you can't possibly do all this. *That's okay.* If you are a parent going through a medical crisis with one child, you are not expected to be able to do everything. The goal here is to set out *some* ideas in hopes maybe one or two will help you out and alleviate some of the guilt that you may end up feeling down the line. But at all points, focus on just making it through that day. Relationships are not fully broken from moments of crisis unless no reparations are made after. If you feel your child has struggled from something like this in the past, it's never too late to work on going over what happened with them, acknowledging how hard it was for everyone, and working to build up that connection again. Remember that our kids so desperately want that connection with us and so they are very willing to forgive us down the line when we work to make that connection longer lasting.

Section 2: Born for Attention



Our second case of special needs are when one child has a developmental delay or difference that often leads to the need for more attention across the lifespan. Examples include children who are on the spectrum, have sensory processing disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, Down's syndrome, and more. This can also include life-long medical issues that may not require the temporary issues that were discussed earlier.

In handling the various needs for these children, parents can be overwhelmed and may end up inadvertently neglecting the unique needs of their other child which are often even greater than for siblings of children without special needs. Generally speaking, the siblings of special needs children can face a host of different problems that parents are often unaware of and so if you are in this situation, you'll need to try and avoid some of the more common pitfalls.

The first issue is about awareness of what's going on for a sibling. Too often us parents want to hide the truth from our kids or we sugar coat it and they don't get an age-appropriate idea of what their sibling is facing. They may see scary behaviours if they have a sibling who is self-harming as some can do or they may have a physical difference that our kids don't understand. Although I acknowledge the reality of needing to be careful in what we say to our kids, we also have to remember that when we are vague or keep things quiet, their minds will come up with things that are much worse. Further, if we don't talk about things, they may take their cues from us and end up not asking the questions that they desperately need answers to. This means the way out of this is to make sure that you have regular, ongoing discussions about the reality of having a special needs sibling and what it means for their sibling and for you all. The more open you are, the more comfortable they will feel in talking to you about everything else as well.

The second issue is the emotional upheaval that comes for siblings of special needs kids. The most common emotional issues that arise are anger and jealousy. Our kids can face many different situations that can cause distress for them simply because they are the sibling of a special needs child. Let's start with the issue of attention. Too often, siblings of special needs kids report being upset at feeling

neglected because their parents don't have the time to give them because they are so focused on the care of their sibling. Depending on the severity or degree of needs for the sibling, this could be minor or could be a real problem. Luckily for us, the key here goes back to what we talked about in week 1 - making sure we have special time, even if it's short, and making sure our children know how much we value it. When this is coupled with being open about the needs of the sibling, we can help our kids feel like they aren't missing out with us and the allotment of our time is not based on how much we love each child.

Another common struggle is to do with missing out on activities or events or even material things because of the needs of the sibling. This may be because of health issues as outlined in section one or it may be because of financial constraints in dealing with the needs of the special needs sibling. It may be because there just isn't enough time to do some of the things our other child would like. Generally speaking parents aren't looking to be mean here, and there are real constraints on what we can do; however, there are some solutions. First, always make sure to do the big events for your other child - graduations, birthdays, etc. Second, try to come up with alternatives as much as possible. For example, if your child is unable to go to a camp with friends for whatever reason, try to find something that does work for your family that would be good, even if it's just some special outings. Third, recruit others to help if it's a matter of logistics. That is, if you just need someone to take your child to an event then try to get a circle of helpers who can be there to pick up the slack that you can't do so your child doesn't have to miss out.

One of the harder emotional struggles is when our child can be angry at their sibling for their special need. As parents this can cause us to be angry at our child because we know that the special need is not a "fault" of our other child or even something that deserves such reproach. However, we have to remember that this is a natural response for a child that is struggling. It can be caused by the issues above or even from the responses from others as our children get first-hand knowledge of how intolerant others can be. It's actually quite normal for a child to blame the victim in this case because they just want things to be easier. If this happens to you, you will need to empathize and validate those emotions but then help your child redirect them towards where they belong - either on a society that is not supportive, people that are not kind, or nowhere as sometimes there isn't a person to blame, just a situation that can be hard sometimes.

The third issue is perfectionism as many siblings of special needs children feel the need to be perfect in order to avoid any other problems for the family. Even very young children can take on this perfectionist role if they feel that any struggle will cause a burden for their parents. In the same vein, some children also try to minimize their own struggles, avoiding sharing problems with parents because they don't want to create more burdens. As we hopefully all know, kids who don't share their problems can end up coping in incredibly unhealthy ways.

Handling this issue is a bit trickier because it has to be an ongoing thing. For starters, you will need to check your own behaviours because if you are constantly stressed out and worried, your child will immediately feel that they cannot add to that. Secondly, check your reactions when your child does share a struggle or fails at something. If you react exasperated or anything like that, they will feel they

are adding to your burden and start shutting down. If you react that way without thinking, then you must apologize and make it clear that you want them to talk to you and sometimes you're just having a hard day. Finally, set up a regular time to chat about how they're feeling, where they are struggling, and acknowledge the tendency to want to be perfect or avoid any other struggles, especially if the needs of their sibling are very high. This will provide you the opportunity to make clear that all their struggles matter to you, even if they don't seem as bad as something their sibling might face. This regular check-in time can also help them feel loved and connected.

The fourth and final issue that you may be facing is how to handle the normal behaviours that you see between siblings. It doesn't matter if one sibling has special needs, you will still face sibling rivalry and jealousy which will come with them making fun of each other, being mean to each other, and so on. The problem isn't that these behaviours happen, it's that as parents we can often be triggered because we don't want our special needs child to feel worse or we see typical sibling behaviours in a more negative light.

It's crucial that we remember that our children in these moments are doing what all siblings do and we need to approach it from that vantage point. Even if our child picks something about the special need to make fun of, we can't let that drag us down to getting too angry at our child. In no way does this mean we ignore it or gloss over it, but rather that we have to treat normal sibling struggles as we would between any siblings in the moment. This really speaks to having *realistic expectations* for the behaviours of our children - all of them. Our special needs children may not always need to be protected by us, especially from their sibling, and may even be more upset if we jump in. Our other children cannot be expected to be more mature than they are and so knowing where they are at developmentally can help us tailor our approaches.

Where we may have to change things is by adding in conversations about why certain topics are things we don't make fun of or use against each other. We have to speak to them about the effects of our words when we speak of something someone has no control over. But this doesn't affect how we empathize with their anger in the moment and help them learn other ways of expressing it. It just means it's an added layer that they will have to learn about as they grow up with a sibling with special needs.

All in all, the crucial point here is really about making sure your child gets to be a child with all that goes with it - love, affection, struggles, anger, fights, and more.

Section 3: The Orchid Child as a Sibling



When people think of special needs, they often think of the health issues and the developmental issues previously discussed; however, one of the more common struggles for parents is when one child is an orchid, or highly sensitive/high-needs. These children add a layer of complexity to the relationships because they are so dependent on having their environment be in tune with them, their needs are far greater for parental assistance, and they thrive on a regularity that isn't always in line with being a sibling. If your eldest is an orchid, it can feel like you're being pulled equally in two directions as the needs of your eldest may match or even exceed that of your baby.

Before we get to the ways in which we handle these stronger needs, I do want to point out that orchid children can make *excellent* siblings in so many ways. Their sensitivity, empathy, and awareness can bring so much to the lives of their siblings that you want to remember this when things are hard (and they can be very hard at the start). The key for us is to remember that this is a long game and we are working with our orchids to address their anxieties while tending to the needs of their sibling and hoping that in the end, everyone has what they need.

So what are the issues that face parents of orchids with more than one?

The first issue is that of change. If your orchid is the eldest, the change of welcoming a new sibling can be overwhelming and *really, really* hard. Orchids will often struggle with certain changes and one of the changes that seems to affect them most is when it has to do with their time or relationship with loved ones, especially their primary carers. They may travel well or handle routine changes as long as they are with the people that keep them feeling safe. Of course, welcoming a new sibling changes their foundation of safety.

In handling this, you will need to remember the following:

1. You must set aside time for your orchid to be with you. The special time issue discussed in week 1 is more paramount for orchids than anyone else. Further, you may need even more of it than before.

2. Do not try to make big changes ahead of the new sibling. If you can, keep most things the same to help them handle the transition, especially if it has to do with their proximity and time with you, like co-sleeping or nursing.
3. Read lots of stories and share stories about welcoming siblings. The more time they have to process this and talk about what will stay the same, the better off they will be. For example, you hopefully won't have to change sleeping arrangements so knowing that they will have that same proximity to you can help as you discuss baby joining you guys in the same room.
4. Allow them to express all their fears of change. This is a great opportunity to let them guide the conversations (if old enough) on what they fear and help them navigate the feelings and come up with solutions.
5. You will be building up new routines with a sibling so go slow. When you're making new changes with baby around, pick one at a time and build them into the routine. Use visual cues if that helps your orchid and make sure that they are confident in that change before making others.

The second issue is that of jealousy or possessiveness. Orchids can be very possessive of their primary carers and many parents fear what will happen with a sibling. You may have seen your orchid get angry or lash out at other children for getting close to you or seen them cry excessively if you hold someone else's baby. Parents then worry about how this will manifest with a new sibling. Luckily for parents of orchids, many siblings actually do love and cherish their baby siblings right from the start. I believe some of this comes from parents being acutely aware of this risk and helping reassure their orchids throughout pregnancy that this doesn't mean they will love them less and that baby is just joining the family and increasing the love. I also believe that many families learn that changing things is what's hardest and so the less we change, the more our orchids can focus their energies on loving their sibling and getting to know them over handling their own anxiety over change.

I want to add to this though because our orchids will still need more of us than most kids their same age, and we need to help them differentiate their need for us versus anger or jealousy towards their sibling. That is, many orchids who feel like they are missing that time with a carer will often lash out at the sibling, thinking that is the cause of their distress, but really it's just missing time with us. In order to help our orchids understand this, I find it helpful to do regular "well checks". This means that we regularly (often daily for younger orchids) check in on how full our relationship wells are, especially for the parent-orchid relationship. As our kids learn to think about how they feel with respect to the time they've had or not had with a carer, they learn to identify that their need is with that well being filled, not anger at the sibling. This helps keep that bond intact between siblings and helps our orchids become more aware of the strong emotions that can arise and how they can see the real *cause* versus the *trigger*.

The third issue is that of time. Although we can often feel like we never have enough time with two kids, when one is an orchid, this problem seems to be compounded. This isn't too surprising if you feel like you have two children who need you equally but in different ways and it's rather non-stop. The

needs of an orchid can be overwhelming at the best of times, but add a baby in the mix and you can feel like you're drowning. Parents often feel guilt here for two reasons:

1. They feel bad that they aren't giving the other child (younger or older) more time.
2. They feel bad that they can feel resentment over the amount they are needed and their own desire for time to themselves.

Either one of these is enough to make us feel guilty, but because our orchids can react so strongly when they don't get this time with us, we can be even more triggered and then feel even more guilt. In balancing the needs of our orchids with our own needs and that of their sibling, I recommend the following:

1. Focus on shared attention and affection with both kids. Yes, your orchid will need one-on-one time with you, but you can connect as a triad with both kids. If your orchid is the youngest, it will help build that sense of connection to their older sibling while also giving time and affection to your eldest. If your orchid is the oldest, they can transfer some of that intense love towards their sibling with you there, helping build their relationship too. Many orchids actually love the carer role as well as being cared for and so this triad can be an excellent means of having both those roles taken care of for them.
2. Make sure you have your well filled as well, even if it's only a little. I know how hard the demands can be, but as the parent of an orchid you are in a unique position by which you need to make sure you have enough in your well to keep giving to your kids. Your orchid will need you in ways most other parents don't understand and if you don't care for yourself, you will lose it and that type of reaction can be devastating to our orchids; thus it's in everyone's best interest that you have some time to recharge. Of course, because of the needs of two, you'll have *less* time to do so. This means you have to start really thinking hard about what gives you that mental and emotional boost and how you can fill that in. I know asking for help is hard for all of us and some of us don't even have it, but if you can, get help. Your relationships depend on it.
3. Involve your eldest in daily help. Whether your eldest is the orchid or not, asking them to help you with little things like cooking or getting lunches ready can be a bonding time and gives your eldest a sense of purpose. If your eldest isn't the orchid, this is a good way to build up some one-on-one time. If your eldest is the orchid, it's a good way to build up some much-needed one-on-one time. Children like to feel helpful so easy tasks that can help you will also help build up that sense of efficacy and utility and the more regular this is, the more part of the routine it is for all and the guilt can start to go away (even if just a bit).

Overall, parenting with an orchid is challenging. Parenting two with an orchid (or two) can be overwhelming but not all is lost. Understanding the needs of your orchid can really help with this. If you need more on orchids, you can look into my course on Raising Orchids.

Section 4: Building Empathy



As I promised earlier, it's time to talk about the primary *benefit* to having a sibling with special needs. Although it can be hard and there are times when our children may feel anger or distress at having to face this, the key benefit is that we have the opportunity to help our children develop a much greater sense of empathy not only for their sibling but beyond.

The key for empathy here is in how we present these issues to our children. The first key is *perspective-taking*. Earlier in this course we spoke about the effects of seeing how similarity helps build bonds; it also helps build empathy and so the more we can utilize perspective-taking, the more our kids can understand what is going on not only in their house, but in other situations as well.

Although theory of mind develops between the ages of 3 and 5, the precursors are there and children's ability to empathize is *definitely* there so the basics of perspective-taking for empathy sake is actually present in younger children than we often realize. The question is how we build this up. Depending on the special needs situation you find your family in, you can focus on the following:

1. Talk about what's happening for the sibling. This may be hard to grasp for some younger kids, but they benefit from hearing us put - in simple terms - that their sibling may struggle in some way. It may be health wise, it may be developmentally, or emotionally. When they hear that someone "is having a hard time with X" it can help them bring up their own sense of caring and compassion.
2. Read stories. If at all possible, it's good to read stories about other kids that are in similar situations. Children learn *a lot* from stories because they remove them from the situation and that removes the anxiety they can feel when things seem directed solely to them. When they

hear it in a story, it's someone else and they can focus on what's happening and see how problems are solved.

3. Link to child's experiences. If you can, it's good to help link whatever the special needs sibling is going through to something the other child can relate to. For example, if it's illness, it could be a time when your child was very sick. If it's emotional, link it to a very hard time your child has had and explain that's how the sibling can feel most of the time. The more they can "see" it from their own experience, the easier it is for them to process.
4. Ask questions. Once you feel your child has somewhat of a grasp on what is going on, it can be helpful to bring questions to your child's mind to think about how they would want people to react to them. Some possible questions include:
 - What would you want people to do for you if you were sick/sad/struggling like this?
 - Do you think it would be helpful if people did X, Y, or Z?
 - Do you think you would need help from others if you were sick?
 - What would help you feel or get better?
 - How would you feel if people did these things to help you?
 - What could people do that might make you feel sad? What might make you feel happy?

This process of thinking about the situation for them helps our kids think about it for others as well. This not only helps in the moment, but can help in future situations as they practice the art of perspective-taking.

The second key is *helping them cope with their own distress*. We have to acknowledge that our kids are going to struggle with this - as I hope was clear earlier - and when we do this, we allow them to move beyond the "me" stage of the situation. Most people believe that the more empathy we have, the better, but it actually doesn't seem to pan out like that in research. It's an upside down U-curve with people who score very low and very high on empathy demonstrating the least empathy. Why does this happen? The low is, well, the low, but the people that are high on empathy often struggle with personal distress. This means that their empathy makes *them* feel bad and so they actually try to avoid the situation to ease their own distress.

Children are more prone to this because they are, by nature, more egocentric. They experience distress when others are upset and their focus goes to them. It can seem awful to have a child that is yelling, "me me me" when someone else is struggling more, but we have to understand that they are really experiencing distress on behalf of the other too. Seeing a sibling who is sick or melting down in an extreme fashion, or just intensely distressed can cause our kids to become sad, angry, or despondent as they shut down and focus inward. When we acknowledge these emotions as a sign of distress and help our children cope with this, then they can get to the other side of distress and move towards helping or just being there.

Once our kids have their distress under control, it's good to talk about why we feel that way, how normal it is, and then start to work on coping mechanisms. These are longer term goals, but are

particularly important when there is a special needs child in the house because our other kids are going to face more distress whether it's seeing others make fun of their sibling or struggle more health-wise, and so on.

The third key is to *offer empathy to our other child*. We have to help our kids realize that empathy goes further than just to the person with special needs, but to those around them. We have to be clear that the effects of having a special needs sibling extends beyond their sibling and we will be asking our child to take on more or accept less because of this. When we can acknowledge the reality for our children - possibly even ourselves as our kids get older - we open up the doorway to understanding that empathy isn't just about others, but about ourselves too. We can't empathize with others if we aren't getting our needs met.

Too often we tend to focus on teaching siblings about how to offer empathy to others while ignoring that they need it extended to them to even be able to think of others. We don't want our kids thinking their job is only to offer this care and consideration to other people who need it while putting themselves at the back of the queue for care. Our kids need us to (a) tell them we understand how hard things may be at any given moment, (b) thank them for what they are doing (even if it's not all that we want), and (c) ask them what we can do to help them out.

Raising compassionate children is a goal for every parent I've ever met and we can use the challenges we may have in our families to help achieve this.

Bonus Section: Patience, Patience, Patience



One of the hardest parts of having a special needs child is building up patience with your other child because of the often time-consuming elements of raising a special needs child. However, this is actually an issue that crosses for *all* families welcoming two kids. We feel we should prepare our kids for having to wait while we have a baby to care for, regardless of any other needs. Too often I've seen people approach this in a very behaviourist way of just simply making a child wait.

It usually doesn't go well.

Young kids being asked to just wait get antsy, upset, dysregulated, and often end up causing chaos. This often leads parents to then threaten, take things away, refuse to do what was asked in the first place, and so on. Not a helpful dynamic.

I do get the idea of needing to help our kids develop their ability to wait. To a certain degree, patience does develop naturally, but not at the rate people seem to think. We all know those impulsive adults who struggle with patience as well so it's clearly not purely a linear development with age.

In thinking about patience, I want to talk briefly about the famous marshmallow experiments done with young preschoolers. If you haven't heard of these already, a preschooler is asked to sit at a table with a marshmallow in front of them (and yes, they have confirmed all kids like marshmallows) and told that if they can sit there and not eat the marshmallow until the experimenter returns, they will get two marshmallows instead. Instead of patience, it's called "delay of gratification", but really, we are speaking about patience. All of us are pretty good at waiting for things we don't want - heck, tax time can be delayed months and I would be happy - it's the things we want that we struggle with.

Now, some kids are very good at waiting and others not so much. But what is fascinating is that the kids who are good at it and manage to wait have *skills* they are using to help them through the time period. Some sit on their hands, others look away somewhere else in the room, but they all find ways to help *distract* them.

It's these skills that too often our kids are missing and that is the crux of where we want to focus our efforts in what we teach our kids. Asking them just to wait is *hard*. So we need to help them find ways to build their patience and then practice this as much as possible without overdoing it to the point of

frustration for them. This means that we need to start *small* and ask them to wait short times and as they build up those skills, you can start to extend the time in increments. I recommend starting as small as waiting ten seconds and building up to minutes over time.

This brings us to the issue of what you can do as the skills to help them. The ideas could be endless, but I suggest some here that you can try and see what works for your own child:

1. Counting. As someone who loves numbers, I always went with counting. It works and my young kids just keep counting until I'm ready.
2. Sing a song. Many kids love to sing so thinking of songs they can sing while they wait is a great way for them to build up their tolerance for waiting.
3. Dance. Movement is necessary for some kids as you can see them almost shaking as they wait. Help them devise a "waiting dance" that they can do while they wait.
4. Put a hand on your wrist. Not great for everything, but when my daughter wanted to ask a question and we were talking, I would ask her to put her hand on my wrist and then I'd put my hand over so she knew I was aware and would give her my attention at the first appropriate moment. The physical connection also helps them regulate.
5. Tell a story. Some kids are natural storytellers so have them make up a story to tell themselves (or you) while they're waiting.

The key thing about these skills is that they require practice so you'll need to implement them regularly. For most families it means at least once a day, but just like not going up in time too quickly, you also don't want to make it so frequent you lead to your child just getting frustrated.

No matter how hard you work on it though, there will be times when our kids just struggle to wait. In those moments, remember to keep yourself calm and forgive them for whatever behaviour you see. Remember that they are still learning and are bound to have some troubles and your job is to continue to be there for them, even when there's another child in the mix.

Thank you for taking part in *Parenting 2.0: The Reality of Parenting Two Kids*. I hope you have found this course helpful on your journey, no matter where in that journey you are. If I haven't had the chance already, I look forward to meeting you in our one-on-one sessions to answer your questions and hopefully help you make the most of your growing family.

This is the end of Parenting 2.0 - Week 4: Special Needs and of the entire course of Parenting 2.0.