

FOR SIBLINGS ONLY

Spring, 2008

FROM THE EDITOR:

Hi Everyone! Welcome to another issue of *For Siblings Only*, a newsletter written just for children who have a brother or sister who needs extra help to learn. Our story this month was written by a girl who has not one, but **two** brothers with autism! Emily's brothers have difficulty with talking, behavior, and playing with others. Emily is a big help to her parents, and they all have a good sense of humor to deal with some of the crazy things that happen in their house! Emily's story was first printed in the Winter, 2003 issue.

Look inside this newsletter for some fun, Spring-y activities to do with your brother or sister. You'll also find a few good books to read if you'd like to learn more about kids with disabilities.

I think you'll like reading about other kids, just like you, who have a brother or sister with learning differences. Now, we'd like to hear from you! Turn to the last two pages of *For Siblings Only* to find out how you can tell us your story. All of our readers will look forward to hearing from YOU!

And just in case you have had a birthday recently, and are now age 10 or older, you can get another newsletter called *Sibling Forum* which is written for older brothers and sisters. If you'd like to receive that newsletter instead of this one, write to me at slevine@frainc.org.

Susan Levine

Editor





EMILY AND THE BOYS

By Emily Kneuer and Susan Levine

My name is Emily Kneuer. I am 9 years old and in third grade. I like Brownies, art and piano, I play basketball and lacrosse and I sing in my church choir. I live with my mom and dad, my two older brothers and two cats and two dogs. My brother Matty is 15 and Danny is 12.

Both of my brothers have autism. Autism is a disability that makes it harder for my brothers to talk, understand things, socialize with others and learn. Matty can talk in short sentences. He loves music and he likes to dance. Matty "dances" all over the house! Matty used to have bad temper tantrums that would scare me. But he takes medication now and that helps a lot. Danny loves to watch DVDs and annoy me! When I get up from the couch, he goes and sits in my seat! Danny talks less than Matty. He just says a word if he wants something.

I'm the youngest child in my family, but I feel like the oldest. My brothers act like two-year-olds even though they are big boys! When they get annoying, I wish they didn't have problems, but if they were normal, they'd annoy me in other ways! The good part of them having disabilities is that they don't boss me around. I do worry, though, about Matty. He likes to go outside, and even though he wouldn't wander away, I'm afraid that someone might take him because we live on a very busy street.

My life may be different from the way things are in other people's homes, but I like my life. It feels normal to me! It even makes me feel kind of special because I have two brothers with autism. I have some very good friends who know all about my brothers. They are used to them and they don't mind coming over to my house. My brothers usually leave us alone and they don't get in the way.



Things usually go smoothly in my house because mom and dad handle things well. My dad and I love to play Nintendo together and my mom and I get to go places just the two of us. When I play basketball, one of my parents comes to watch while the other stays home with the boys. Even though things can be crazy in my house, mom, dad and I find lots of things to laugh about. One especially funny moment I remember happened when Matty accidentally knocked down the Christmas tree. We had a good laugh about that! We like being able to laugh about some of the silly and different things that happen at my house. Even with all the differences we are one big happy family.

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WHAT DO YOU THINK?



- 1.) What does Emily think is good about having two brothers with disabilities?
- 2.) What do you think is bad about having two brothers who have trouble learning?
- 3.) Emily and her parents like to laugh about some of the silly things that happen in their house. What things do you laugh about in your house?

FOCUS ON FEELINGS:



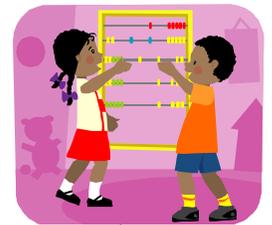
Emily has a very different family situation with not one, but two brothers who both have disabilities. With two big brothers, two cats and two dogs, there is always something going on and her house! Emily is a very busy girl too – with Brownies, piano lessons, church choir and basketball and lacrosse. Emily gets to go on vacation every year with her aunt and her cousins at a beach house near the ocean.

Her brothers and her parents stay home! Emily also goes once a month to a group for children who have a brother or sister who has trouble learning. At that group she gets to talk about her different kind of family.



From the sound of Emily's story, it seems like she is pretty happy with things at her house. In the past, her brother's tantrums used to be scary for her, but that is much better now. She still worries about her brother going outside alone, but there's always a parent home to look after him and handle the situation. And Danny can get pretty annoying when he always tries to take her seat!

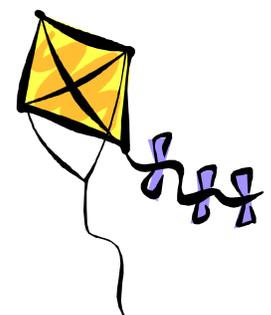
The thing that stands out the most when you meet Emily and her mom is that they have a good sense of humor. Laughing and keeping a positive attitude helps them deal with some of the different and crazy things that go on in their house. Laughing can make you feel better too, even on a bad day. That's a good thing for all of us to remember! Thanks, Emily for sharing your story with us!



BROTHER/SISTER THINGS TO DO:

Did you know that all children learn by playing and having fun and doing new and different things? So, finding a fun activity is a great way to teach your brother or sister something new while you both have a great time! Here are three exciting Springy ways for you to play with your brother or sister. By playing with him you will help him learn, and you will both share some very special time together! Look at the activities below and choose the one that sounds the best for the two of you to do together. Ask mom or dad for help setting up the activity so it works smoothly and everyone has a great time!

- 1.) A windy Spring day is the perfect time for flying a kite! Kite flying is something just about everyone can enjoy. Of course, you'll need a kite and a grown-up to help you get it launched. You and your brother or sister can take turns holding the string, or



you can help your sibling hold the string if he can't do things alone. You can both feel the string as the wind pulls it tightly or lets it fly more loosely. If your sibling is in a wheelchair, special seat or stroller, try tying the string onto it, then carefully pull the chair or stroller backward and watch the kite really fly! Follow the path of the kite as it flies back and forth through the sky. Talk about the colors and the wind and the way the string feels. If you've learned a song about kites or the wind, sing it for your sister or brother. Happy sailing!

2.) On a warm Spring day, you can do these barefoot activities!

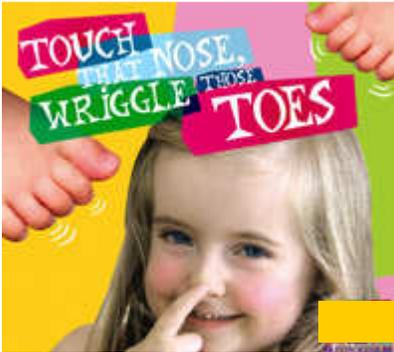
It's fun to feel different textures on your bare feet. This kind of activity is good for a child who is learning to walk or run better or who needs help with balancing. Feeling different things with your feet helps you wiggle your toes and feel every part of your foot. One great thing to do is to stand or walk on sand. This is easy if you have the beach near your house! If you don't, you can use your sandbox or get a small bag of sand and fill a plastic bowl big enough to stick your feet in. Take turns putting your feet in the sand, wiggling your toes and covering up all of your feet. Another fun but messy texture to feel on your feet is Jell-O! Make two boxes of Jell-O in a plastic bowl and let it harden just a little bit. Take it outside on the grass or the patio and bring a bowl of water and a towel too! Take turns stepping in the Jell-O and wiggling your toes! Talk about how squishy it feels.



When you are done wiggling your toes and jiggling around, step in the bowl of water and then dry your feet with the towel. Help your brother or sister if they need help. Can you think of other textures to feel with your feet?



3.) How about playing a copy cat game? If your brother or sister is little or has a hard time following directions, follow this easier way to play! Start the game by sitting or standing facing your sibling. Do an action that your sibling would think is interesting and can copy - such as banging the table, clapping hands, sticking out your tongue or jumping up and down. Say "you do it." If he needs help, then you or mom or dad can help him to copy you. Be sure to say "good job" or "hooray" or something else to let him know that you're happy he copied you. After you both do one action, do another and another!



If your brother or sister is older and is able to, then play this copycat game like "Simon Says." Stand or sit facing each other. Before you do an action say what you will do (for example, "Simon Says touch your nose" or "Simon Says clap.") Tell your brother or sister that he should copy you. Play the game slowly at first and help your sibling so he feels good about being able to do the game. Then change places and let him be the "Simon Says"

caller. Your mom or dad might give you ideas of the kinds of things to ask your sibling to do, things that he needs to learn. If your brother or sister is working on talking, then trying to get him to copy words or sounds might be a very good game. I'm sure you'll come up with great ideas! Be sure to praise your sibling when he tries to copy you.

SPECIAL DEFINITIONS:

When Jill Quigley, from Nazareth, Pennsylvania, was 8 years old, she wrote to *For Siblings Only* to explain what Down syndrome was. She has a younger brother with Down syndrome. Here's Jill's definition with a little more information added:

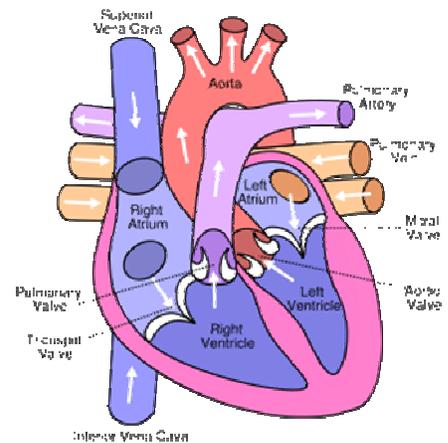
Down Syndrome:

"Everybody has something in their body called a cell. There are lots of cells in your body. Cells are so tiny. There is something even tinier in the cells called chromosomes." They are in every part of our bodies. They tell our bodies how tall to grow, how healthy we'll be, what color hair we have and other important things. People usually have 46 chromosomes in each tiny cell. "Kevin and other children like him have 47 chromosomes in every cell in their bodies and that makes them have Down syndrome." People with Down syndrome learn more slowly than others. They usually have learning problems and take more time to learn things. They may look

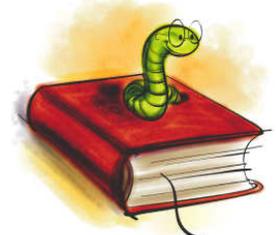


different in some ways too. They may be shorter than other children their age, have slightly different shaped eyes and seem weaker or floppier as babies. Some children with Down syndrome also have heart problems and may need to have an operation to fix it. Children with Down syndrome usually learn to walk and talk later than other children. But they love to play and have fun just like all boys and girls do! Thank you again, Jill, for helping us with this definition of Down syndrome!

Heart Defects:

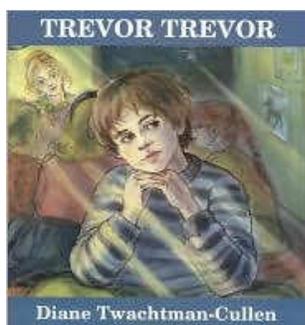


The heart is one of the most important parts of our bodies. The heart pumps blood throughout bodies, keeping us healthy and alive. Some children are born with a heart that doesn't work quite right because it is missing important parts. Children with heart problems are sometimes weaker, and not as healthy as other children. They get tired easily and might have trouble with active things like crawling and walking and running. Some heart problems can be helped with medicine, but many children with heart problems need to have an operation to fix their hearts. Heart operations are serious though, and the problem can't always be fixed all the way. Other children can be helped greatly by an operation and everything can be fixed perfectly so they can be healthier and strong. Some children with Down syndrome and other disabilities have heart problems too.



LET'S VISIT THE LIBRARY:

You can learn so many things from books! There are many great stories about kids who have trouble learning. The first book gives us an idea of what it might be like to have autism....



TREVOR, TREVOR, by Twachtman-Cullen, 1998.

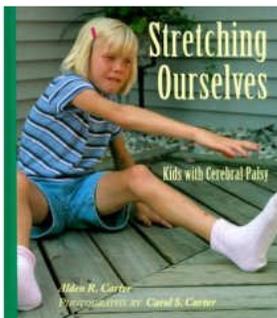
This is the story of a young boy with autism. The other second graders in Trevor's class notice that he seems

different from them. His teacher, though, helps the other children see just how special he is, and how very much like them he is. The teacher knows that Trevor is very smart, but he doesn't always know the right way to act with his classmates. Trevor doesn't like to touch sticky things like glue, and he has trouble with loud noises, but he really helps his classmates with a very big and important project. Trevor and the other children learn to understand each other.

Along with the book, there are two cut-outs of Trevor in two different moods. The paper dolls help the reader act out the scenes in the book so they can better understand Trevor's feelings.

The next book tells a great story about children with cerebral palsy, which means they have trouble using their muscles to make their bodies do all the things that most children can do easily.....

STRETCHING OURSELVES: KIDS WITH CEREBRAL PALSY by Carter.



This book explains cerebral palsy in a simple way for young readers to understand. Photos and stories tell about 4 different children with cerebral palsy. Emily has stiff muscles, but she tries to do everything that other children can do, including skating and playing basketball. She attends a regular school but is in a special education classroom. Nic uses a wheelchair and he has trouble talking. He uses a talking computer and his sense of humor to get along well with others. Nic goes to a special school. Tanner tries hard to play football. He acts in his school play and does many things that other children can do. Leslie has trouble using her muscles to walk and get around, but she loves riding horses! Young readers will learn a lot from the four children in this book.

Remember, you can always find good stories about children who have trouble learning when you visit the library! You can even ask the librarian to help you find books about children with the kind of learning differences that your brother or sister has. You just might learn something new!



CALLING ALL KIDS!

Now it's your turn to share your story with the readers of *For Siblings Only!* Just answer the questions below, or use a separate piece of paper to write your very own story. Mom or Dad can help if you want. Think about the questions below, and then fill in your answers. You can mail them back by writing to *For Siblings Only*, 35 Haddon Ave., Shrewsbury, NJ 07702. Or you can e-mail your answers to slevine@frainc.org. And thank you for sharing your story with us!



1.) My favorite thing to do with my brother or sister who needs extra help to learn is

2.) I get frustrated when my brother or sister

3.) My parents get angry when

4.) Here is my own story about me and my brother or sister who has trouble learning



5.) My name _____ age _____

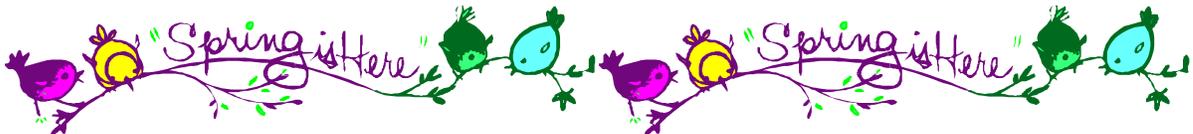
My brother or sister's name _____ age _____

My sibling's disability or learning problem

My address

Happy Spring! Look for *For Siblings Only* this summer in your mailbox or on line at www.frainc.org.

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