



FOR SIBLINGS ONLY

A Newsletter for Brothers and Sisters of
Children with Disabilities

Fall, 2009

FROM THE EDITOR:

A very Happy Halloween Hello to all of our readers! I hope you enjoy this issue of *For Siblings Only*. You will learn about so many things inside, and you'll have fun sharing some Halloween activities with your brother or sister who needs extra help to learn.

This issue will be the last issue of *For Siblings Only*. I started writing this newsletter in 1980.....almost 30 years ago! So many wonderful brothers and sisters just like you have written to tell all about their siblings who need extra help to learn. We had fun sharing their stories, and helping to teach about differences.

You can find several of the back issues of *For Siblings Only* on this website: www.frainc.org. When you visit, click on family support, then click on sibling support, then click on sibling newsletters to see the issues you can download. And be sure to keep visiting your local library for books about disabilities and brothers and sisters. You can also ask mom and dad to look for books for you on www.amazon.com (search by disability).

I can be reached by e-mail if I can answer any questions for you (slevine@frainc.org). Thank you for being part of *For Siblings Only*. Keep smiling and sharing the fun with your brother or sister.

Susan Levine

Editor

MALEN AND MARA

By Mara Grubaugh and Susan Levine



Hi! My name is Mara Grubaugh and I am 8 years old and in third grade. I take dance lessons which include hip hop, jazz, and floor gymnastics. My older sister Malen is ten and is in fourth grade. She loves to watch my dance competitions. She watches the recital DVDs so often that one of them even broke! Malen was born with Down syndrome, which makes her have problems with learning and doing things that other kids can do easily. People with Down syndrome don't learn as fast, and sometimes, they even have to go to a different school. My sister just started going to a different school this year. When she was in my school, she was in some of the same classes with other children without learning problems. But even in those classes, she did different work.

My mom explained that in the new school, the work is easier and this will help her learn better. The teachers in this special school go more slowly so it's easier for Malen to follow what they are teaching. There are many other children with Down syndrome and other disabilities in this school and they all learn the same stuff. I think Malen likes being in school with other children with Down syndrome because she feels like she can keep up with them and won't get so frustrated.

Malen really wants to learn to read. She can now read some words with 3 or 4 letters. When she tries to read and gets frustrated, she stomps off and says, "I want my Daddy." She is really a Daddy's girl!

One Sunday a month, Malen gets together with other children with Down syndrome to do a group activity. The mothers call the group "The Circle of Friends." Sometimes they go swimming or do something else interesting. Malen has many good friends in that group.



My friends are pretty used to Malen. They like to include her most of the time when we are playing. When my friends or other kids in our town or at the beach club pay special attention to Malen, I feel very happy. I'm glad she has friends.

Most of the time, I like to include Malen with my friends. We usually try to teach her what we are playing so she can play along with us. Sometimes, teaching Malen makes the game very slow, and that can get frustrating. Then, mom helps by taking her out of the room and finding something else fun for her to do.

Malen knows she is the big sister, and she tries to tell me what to do. She gets frustrated when I don't always do what she wants. When that happens, she sometimes scratches me or yells at me. Then my mom says "Make happy choices, not sad choices." This helps to remind Malen not to scratch or yell! The truth is, that while I am younger than Malen, I really am the oldest, because I can take care of her, and learning is not as hard for me.

The best part of having a sister with Down syndrome is that I like to teach Malen, and she is happy when I spend time with her. That makes me feel really happy too! The hardest part is that when I try to include her in activities with my friends, it can be slow and frustrating. I think having me for her little sister has helped Malen a lot. Even when we were very little, she would try to copy me and it helped her learn.

Malen loves to talk! She always has something to say! But other people, both children and adults, can't always understand her. I often have to explain what she is saying. I also try to teach others about Down syndrome. I let people know that she has Down syndrome and that makes it harder for her to learn. Most adults are nice to Malen. They think she's so cute!

When Malen grows up, I think it will be easier for her because she will know so much more by then. I think she will be able to do many things that other adults can do.

"For Siblings Only" newsletter is published in print and on-line with partial funding from the Monmouth County Board of Freeholders.

*We thank the **Page Hill Foundation** for its support to mail these quarterly newsletters.*

"For Siblings Only" is partially funded by The Bell Family and Monmouth Park Charity Fund.



I would like everyone to know that things are really hard for children with Down syndrome to understand, and that they need extra help to learn. I want everyone to know that Down syndrome is not a disease, and you can't get it unless you were born with it. It is not something to be afraid of, either. It's no one's fault that Malen has Down syndrome. It's just the way she was born, and I love her just the way she is. People with Down syndrome learn a lot better and are happy when people are nice to them. I'm proud of Malen, and I know she is proud of me too!

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

- 1.) Why do some children with Down syndrome or other disabilities go to different schools?
- 2.) What is Mara's favorite thing about having a sister who needs extra help to learn?
- 3.) What is your favorite thing about having a brother or sister with learning differences?



LET'S TALK ABOUT FEELINGS:

Mara is such a good teacher for Malen. Even as a baby, she helped Malen learn! Mara feels happy when her sister is happy, and Malen is especially happy when Mara spends time with her. Both girls feel good when other children and adults are nice to Malen. Mara wants her sister to have friends and to feel included, because she knows how great that feels.

Mara talks a lot about how children with Down syndrome and other disabilities need extra help to learn. Some children can learn in regular classrooms in schools right in your community, while other children need to go to a special school. Mara wasn't so sure about her sister's move to a special school, but her mother explained that the teaching she would get at the special school and the friends she would make there would be just the right thing for Malen.

Does your brother or sister go to school at the same school you go to? Does he or she go to a special school? Parents and teachers together try to pick the right class for each child so that the child can learn and grow up to be the very best that he or she can be.



Mara is proud of every new thing her sister does. And I know you are proud of your brother or sister too. Just like Mara, you know how hard it is for children with learning problems to do things that come quite easily to you.



At *For Siblings Only*, we are proud of all of the brothers and sisters who read this newsletter. And we are very proud of Mara! Thank you for telling your story, Mara!

BROTHER/SISTER THINGS TO DO:

There are so many fun activities to do in the Fall. It's fun to be outside and it's fun to get ready for Halloween and Thanksgiving. Here are some brother/sister things to do to help you both enjoy this time of year. Ask Mom or Dad to help choose and set up the best activity for you and your sibling to do. And then, have fun!

1.) COLOR GAMES



Halloween is a great chance to help teach your brother or sister colors. Collect Halloween decorations and colorful things in orange, black and white. You can also use markers in those colors, sheets of orange, black and white construction paper, colored streamers or other toys in Halloween colors. Help your brother or sister sort these colored objects into different piles. Name the colors and talk about them. Be sure to clap and say "hooray" when your sibling puts a colored object in the correct pile. Brothers and sisters like you can be such good teachers!



2.) FACE PAINTING

It's always fun to face paint, but it is a messy activity, too. Make sure an adult helps with this! Ask Mom or Dad to buy different colored face paints. Sit in front of a mirror with your brother or sister and make colorful faces. You might



want to have an adult do the painting. Try making clown faces or scary witches. For Thanksgiving, make an Indian face with colorful face markings. This is a great time to talk to your sibling about colors and body parts ("look at your mouth. It's painted red." "Where is your nose?" "Where are your cheeks? See the red and blue stripes!") Be sure to get mom or dad to take a picture when you're all done. It will help you remember a fun, colorful and messy day! Clean-up might be best in the bathtub!

3.) POPCORN GAMES

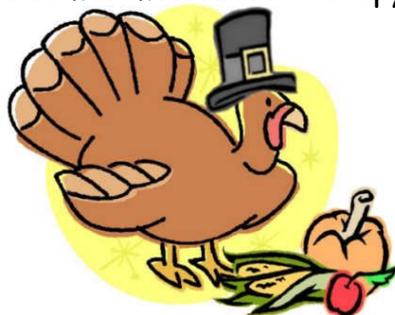


It's fun to pop popcorn on a cool fall day. You can even turn popping popcorn into a game! Pop some popcorn (the kind without butter or oil) and pour some into a medium-sized bag or box to make a touch and feel game. Help your sibling put his hands into the popcorn and really feel it, squeeze it, swish it, move it back and forth from one hand to the other. Try putting his whole arm in the popcorn or even his feet! He can wiggle his feet around or even step in it. You can try it too! You can also try hiding one or two small toys in the popcorn. See if your brother or sister can feel around in the popcorn to find the toy. If your brother or sister is too little to eat popcorn, have mom or dad help you make sure it doesn't get into his mouth. If it's okay though, you can both end the activity with a little popcorn snack!

SPECIAL DEFINITIONS:

THERAPY:

Children who are delayed or have a disability need special help learning how to do things. They may start "school" very early - even as babies - and continue to need extra help when they go to your school. Children with disabilities or special needs may get help at home, at school or at a hospital from special teachers or therapists. This extra help is sometimes called therapy.



Physical Therapy (PT): This kind of therapy works on movement activities and muscle exercises. In physical therapy, some children learn to hold their head up steadily, sit by themselves, crawl, walk and run without falling. They may also exercise their muscles so their muscles get stronger. Or, if their muscles are too tight, the therapists may teach them to relax their muscles so that they can do physical activities more easily. A physical therapist might also use special things like a walker, parallel bars or a special seat or stander to help the child do more for himself. Older children might continue to need physical therapy to help them walk steadier or learn to go up and down steps and slides at the playground.



Speech Therapy (ST): This kind of therapy helps children learn to talk and to understand words and sentences. In speech therapy, children can learn to move their lips and tongue to make different sounds and words. After a while, the children learn to put the words together to make sentences. Speech therapists also help to teach children what the words mean. Sometimes, children are taught "signs" - hand movements - that mean different words. Using "signs" can even help the child remember how to say the word. Some speech therapists even teach children who have trouble eating how to chew and swallow better.



Occupational Therapy (OT): This kind of therapy helps children learn to use their fingers and hands better so they can do puzzles, string beads and even write better with a pen or pencil. Some children have a hard time moving their fingers to do some of these harder things. Some occupational therapists also help children learn to balance and use their bodies better. They may do activities like swinging or spinning to work on balancing.

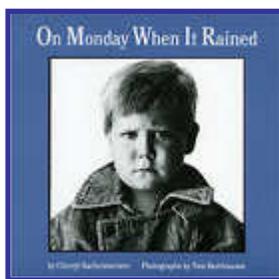


Developmental Therapy: This kind of therapy is usually done with children up to 3 years old. Developmental therapists are usually teachers, so once kids are in school, they have a teacher in the classroom to teach them. Developmental therapists work on things like colors, shapes, letters, body parts and opposites (in/out, up/down, on/off). They also work on holding a crayon and drawing, and playing simple games. It is work for the child to learn these things, but it sounds like fun, doesn't it!



LET'S VISIT THE LIBRARY:

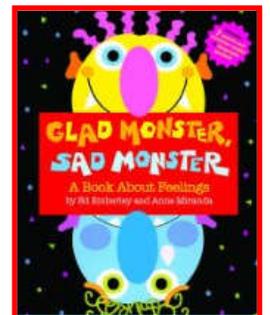
ON MONDAY WHEN IT RAINED by Cherryl Kachenmeister



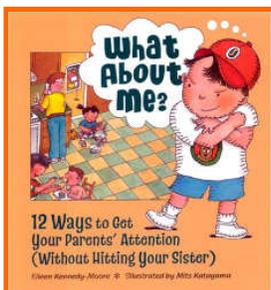
Because it was raining outside, the little boy in the story couldn't go outside and ride his bike. How did he feel....."Disappointed." Each event in the book has a feeling attached to it.....and a wonderful picture of the child's face showing the way he feels. This is a fun book to teach about feelings. Read each story, and try to guess the feeling! You can try to make the faces too!

GLAD MONSTER, SAD MONSTER by Anne Moranda and Ed Emberly

Very colorful and silly monsters act out feelings for little boys and girls. This book comes with masks the child can try on to act out the feeling. What a fun book.....just in time for costumes, masks and Halloween!



WHAT ABOUT ME? TWELVE WAYS TO GET YOUR PARENTS' ATTENTION WITHOUT HITTING YOUR SISTER by Eileen Kennedy-Moore



I love the title of this book! This fun rhyming book gives children good ideas for how to get mom and dad's attention, without being mean to their brother or sister! The good ideas include sharing, and even giving your sister the bigger piece, and

helping to keep the baby happy by making silly faces. This is a great book for parents and children to read and talk about together.



SOME THOUGHTS FROM YOU:

In the summer issue of *For Siblings Only*, we asked our readers a few questions about their brother or sister who has trouble learning. To see what other students had to say, read the questions and their answers below. Then think about how you would have answered the question.

1.) I feel proud of myself when.....

- I do the monkey bars at my school all by myself
- I learned how to pump on the swing
- I do a handstand a little better
- I draw something really well



2.) I feel proud of my brother or sister who has trouble learning when....

-he does something right
-he scratches his own back instead of asking me!
-she crawls a little bit
-when she says mommy and daddy
-when we have her christening



I am proud of all of our *For Siblings Only* readers. You are some of the best brothers and sisters in the whole, wide world. You help your siblings learn things that are hard for them, and you help mom and dad, too. Keep up the great work!

"For Siblings Only"

A Newsletter for brothers and sisters of children with disabilities

Editor: Susan P. Levine

Published by Family Resource Assoc., Inc., 35 Haddon Ave., Shrewsbury, NJ 07702

Phone: 732-747-5310 Fax: 732-747-1896 www.frainc.org

No part of this newsletter may be printed without the permission of Family Resource Assoc., Inc.

SIBLING GROUPS: Through *For Siblings Only*, you got to read about other children who have brothers and sisters who need extra help to learn. Another way to meet other brothers and sisters is to go to a sibling group. If you have had the opportunity to go to a sibling group, you know how fun these groups can be. If you live in the central New Jersey area, you can come to a sibling group at Family Resource Associates in Shrewsbury, NJ. Groups for brothers and sisters aged 4 to 9 are held on the last Thursday of every month from 4-5 pm. For more information, visit our website at www.frainc.org. If you are in another part of New Jersey or in another state, visit this website to find a group near you: www.siblingsupport.org. Or, mom and dad can check with one of the National websites for Down syndrome (www.ndss.org or www.ndsccenter.org) or for disabilities www.thearc.org.



Thank you for all of your support of *For Siblings Only* through the last several years. And thank you to each and every brother or sister who wrote something for the newsletter. Our readers loved hearing from you!

For Siblings Only

Family Resource Assoc., Inc.
35 Haddon Avenue
Shrewsbury, NJ 07702
www.frainc.org