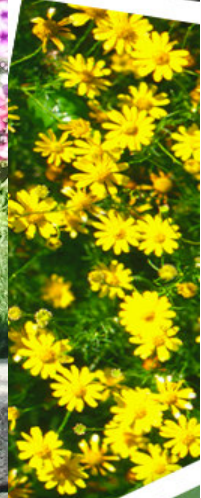
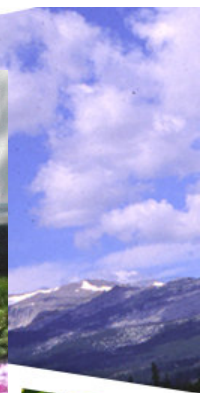


# Siblings

Themes in  
Research & in Life



**Leanne Seaver, MA, Executive Director**  
**Hands & Voices**



Sibling relationships - and 80 percent of Americans have at least one - outlast marriages, survive the death of parents, resurface after quarrels that would sink any friendship. They flourish in a thousand incarnations of closeness and distance, warmth, loyalty and distrust. ~*Erica E. Goode, "The Secret World of Siblings," U.S. News & World Report, 10 January 1994*





# Research shows...

**A Penn State University study found that by age 11, children spend more free-time (33%) with siblings than with any other people in their lives, even more time than they spend by themselves.**

**Sibling issues stem from...**

- Evolving Developmental Needs**
- Individual Temperaments**
- Role Models**
- Special Needs**



**“Siblings are the people we practice on, the people who teach us about fairness and cooperation and kindness and caring – - quite often the hard way.”**

***~Pamela Dugdale***



# DHH Research Points to these Sib Issues & Themes

- Parent attention has been diverted to the DHH child's needs
- Hearing sibs struggle to be “heard” when communication is geared towards a DHH sib
- Responsibility for “helping” placed early and often on hearing sib shoulders
- Defensive, protective role among peers and “mean kids” at school & around the neighborhood



# Informal H&V Sib Survey Results

- 1. We are a normal family.**
- 2. I'm a better person for having a sib who is deaf or hard of hearing.**
- 3. It's hard to watch & experience my (deaf/hard of hearing/hearing impaired) sibling's struggle. And sometimes it's a struggle for me, too.**

# The Gift of the Sib

Siblings have a socializing effect on one another. Their interactions teach negotiation, compromise, and other problem solving skills.

The permanence of the sibling relationship makes it the most fruitful landscape for social learning.



## Sibs Provide Practice for Social Competency

**The quality of the sibling relationship was also related to the social competence of the siblings...**

**Previous research showed that sibling relationships provide opportunities for role modeling.**

*(McGillicuddy-De Lisi, 1993; Stoneman & Brody, 1993).*





**“Family context is important in understanding experiences of deaf children and their hearing siblings. The model replaces assumptions of hearing loss as individual disability...”**

from *“Sibling Relationships of Deaf Children: The Impact of Child and Family Characteristics”*

Rehabilitation Psychology  
2002, Vol. 47, No. 1, 73–91



# Social Stigma

(Siblings) may not want their friends to see their brother or sister with a disability out of fear that they or their sibling will be treated badly, or even just differently

*(Cmic & Leconte, 1986; Harvey & Greenway, 1984; McHale et al., 2007; McKeever, 1983).*



# Where has all the attention gone?

“The parents’ increased attention to the deaf child ultimately leaves the other children with less interaction time than they were accustomed to.

(Luterman 1979)



## Rose Strain

Fillery (2000) highlighted the role of 'elucidator' that may be assumed by the hearing sibling; this role leads to more responsibility being placed upon the sibling and may result in irritation and resentment if it interferes with social interactions.

Siblings taking on such a role may feel they have 'lost their childhood' and identity, seeing themselves merely as a go-between (Luterman, 1987; Ogden, 1996). Gregory et al. (1995) and Slesser (1994) support this notion with the finding that 62 per cent and 50 per cent (respectively) of hearing siblings were described as having some sense of responsibility for their deaf brother/sister.

Furthermore, it has been suggested that siblings of deaf children may feel jealous and neglected in response to parental or professional attention aimed at their deaf brother/sister

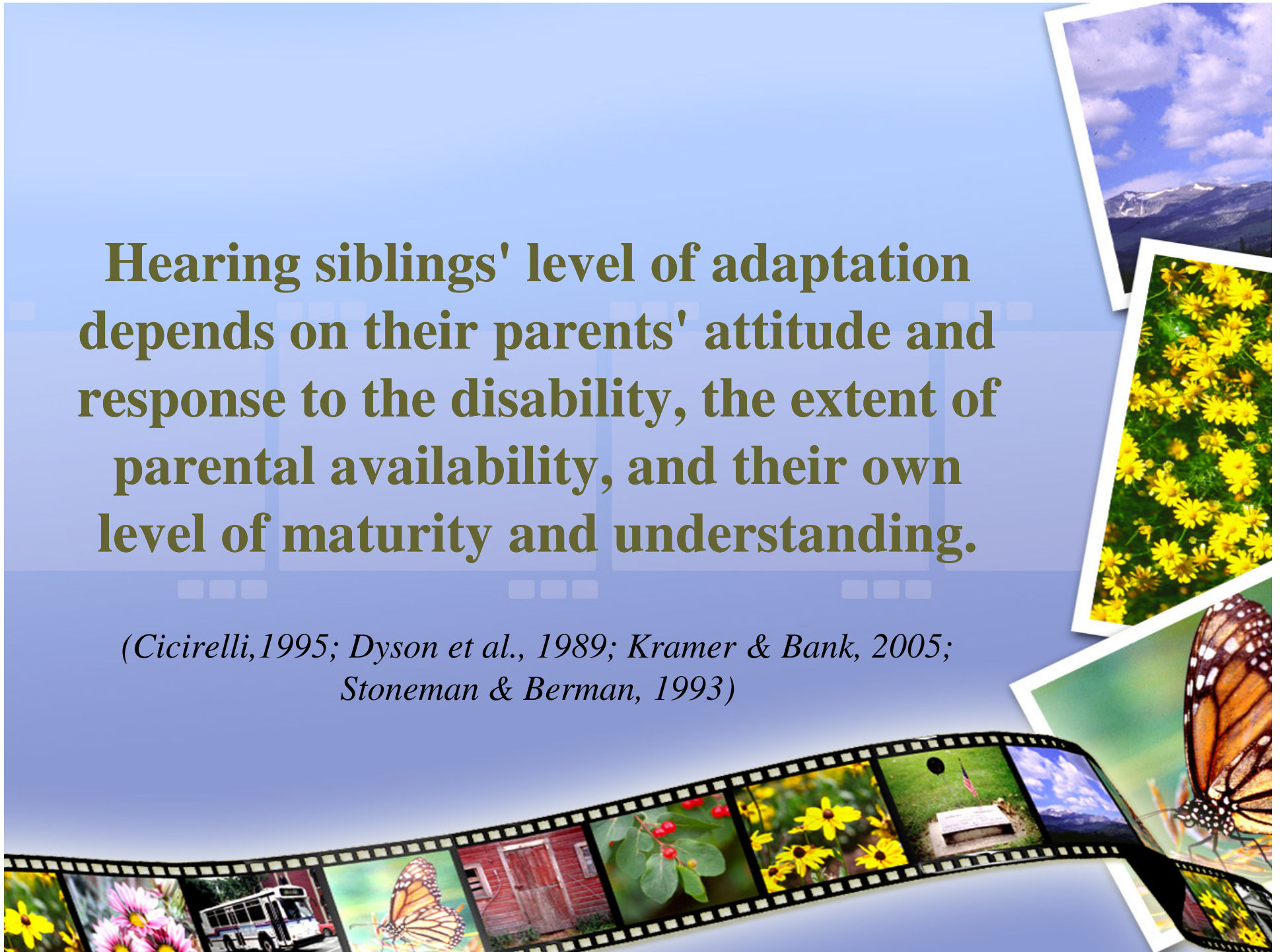
(e.g. Harris, 1996; Marschark, 1997; Gregory, 1976; Slesser, 1994).



**...it is not uncommon for hearing siblings to develop pseudosensory deficits *to illicit more attention from the parents*...some strategies may be illness, tantrums or failures in school. The normal siblings may also carry deep-seated resentments towards the deaf child as well as the parents.” (Sharkey, 1987)**

**Hearing siblings' level of adaptation depends on their parents' attitude and response to the disability, the extent of parental availability, and their own level of maturity and understanding.**

*(Cicirelli, 1995; Dyson et al., 1989; Kramer & Bank, 2005; Stoneman & Berman, 1993)*





**“o, what . 'm  
this is your mother's fault.”**

# The Good News!

These older siblings may enjoy being interpreters, role models, helpers, and supporters and may feel a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. **Many of these siblings pursue humanitarian or advocacy professions** in adulthood (*Mindel & Feldman, 1987*).

Siblings of children who are deaf or hard of hearing may exhibit many positive traits, such as **greater levels of maturity, tolerance of differences in other people, empathy, patience, flexibility, and pride** in helping their parents with their brother or sister with a hearing loss (*Atkins, 1987*).







# “Simultaneous Views of Reality”

‘[...was that (communication) a major problem or did you just find ways round it?] *h, we found ways round it, there was no, er ... if we wanted to get anything to each other, we could do.*’

*‘ou couldn’t have any sort of conversation, that would be very difficult ... it probably tended to be more superficial.’* (Male, adult, early 30s)

**“Respondents, therefore, do not need to be judged as dishonest; they are merely presenting their version of events, an account of the way in which they have made sense of the experience of growing up with a deaf sibling.”**

*(Tattersall, Young, 2003, “Exploring the Impact on Hearing Children of Having a Deaf Sibling” Deafness & Education International, Whurr Publishers)*



# Consider these strategies...

**“Mom likes him best.”**



Reaffirm your love for everybody “just the same” but acknowledge that it could look & feel like the DHH sib is getting more attention...true, *but attention isn't love*. “He may need more attention, but he doesn't get any extra love.” Make a plan for special one-on-one time.

**“I can't add to my parents' burden with my problems.”**

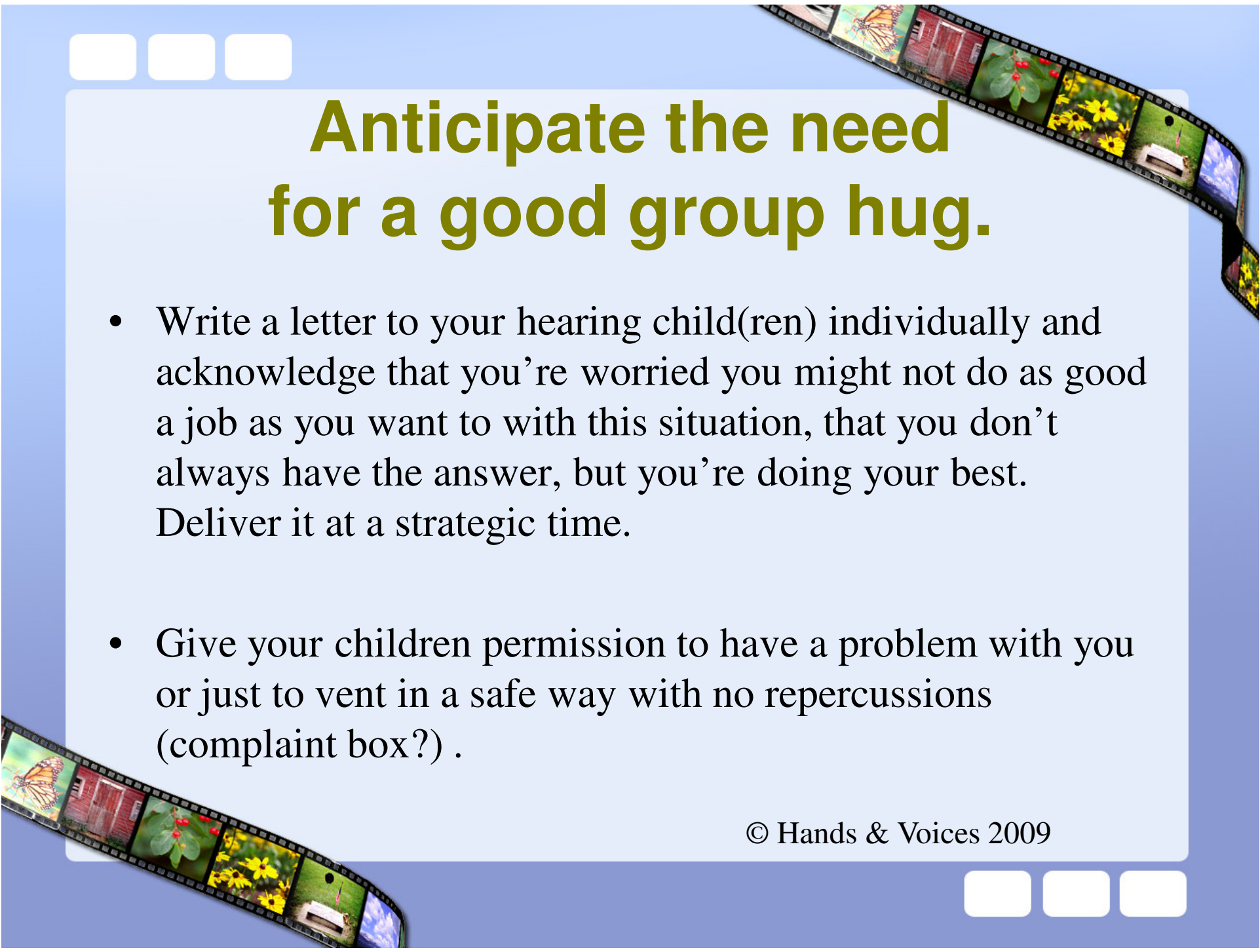


Keep a careful watch on problem behaviors or other manifestations that something is going wrong...this “cry from the wilderness” is a plea for your time and attention.

**“My children fight all the time & I think poor communication is part of the problem.”**



Separate kids until they're calm, and count to ten yourself! Sometimes it's best just to give everybody some space for a little while and not immediately rehash the conflict. Then give a fair amount of time for each kid to convey his/her side of the story, and make sure everyone understands one another. Sometimes “work it out between yourselves” isn't a great solution when communication is compromised, so offer a couple of solutions that you approve of, invite their input, then choose a solution.



# Anticipate the need for a good group hug.

- Write a letter to your hearing child(ren) individually and acknowledge that you're worried you might not do as good a job as you want to with this situation, that you don't always have the answer, but you're doing your best. Deliver it at a strategic time.
- Give your children permission to have a problem with you or just to vent in a safe way with no repercussions (complaint box?) .



## Feel their pain.

“It can’t be easy having a brother who can’t hear you...”

“... don’t think ... tell you often enough that ... know how hard you’re trying to communicate with your sister. Thank you for working hard on that.”



## “Family-Based Group Intervention”

### **SIB SHOPS:**

**Acknowledge that being the brother or sister of a person with special needs is for some a good thing, others a not-so-good thing, and for many, somewhere in-between. They reflect a belief that brothers and sisters have much to offer one another — if they are given a chance. Sibshops are a spirited mix of new games (designed to be unique, off-beat, and appealing to a wide ability range), new friends, and discussion activities. The Sibshop curriculum and more info is available at: <http://www.siblingsupport.org/sibshops>**



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