

YOUNG SIBLINGS WORKSHOP

Age: Under 10 years old

Duration: 2 hours

Schedule

15 minutes: Icebreaker Activity

- Go around the room and have everyone say their name & favorite game to play with their sibling

5 minutes: Welcome

- Go over bathroom locations, confidentiality, respecting one another

20 minutes: Understanding Down Syndrome: *Reading a Story*

READING A STORY

Supplies Needed:

- A children's book that will prompt conversation about Down syndrome. There are many to choose from. Find your book by checking out www.woodbinehouse.com.

Lessons learned:

- Participants will get to know facts and experiences of Down syndrome
Facilitators should use this activity as an opportunity to teach brothers and sisters about Down syndrome, factually and from practical experience. Participants should use this activity to address some facts, feelings, and difficult moments about Down syndrome. Some important facts can be found in the "Activities for Older Participants" section of this site, specifically in the Jeopardy game. In our Topics sections, you can learn about commonly experienced feelings from brothers and sisters. Facilitators can also use this to begin discussions about brothers' and sisters' individual experiences of having a sibling with Down syndrome.

5 minutes: BREAK

15 minutes: What Makes You Special

WHAT MAKES YOU SPECIAL

Supplies Needed:

- Construction paper
- Scissors
- Glue
- Writing utensils

Lessons learned:

- Participants have an opportunity to realize what makes them special to encourage themselves, as well as what makes their sibling special to help appreciate them even in the tough times
- Participants will get accurate answers to their questions about Down syndrome that may arise as participants discuss what makes their sibling special.

For these activities, participants may enjoy creating a flower or a turkey (if your workshop happens near Thanksgiving!) or something similar that allows participants to write on petals, feathers, etc., qualities of themselves and their sibling that make them special. You could choose to have siblings create one flower for themselves and one for their sibling (similar to the similarities and differences activity), or you could have one flower that represents all of the good qualities for the sibling team, so they can see how special they are together.

These special qualities may not always be positive, so be prepared to talk with your brothers and sisters about some of their negative feelings they have about their sibling. For example, someone may say that their sibling's special quality is not having to do the same chores around the house. In that case, you will want to have read our resources for "**feelings of unequal treatment**" on this site, to ensure you are prepared for the discussion.

15 minutes: Difficult Moments

DIFFICULT MOMENTS

Supplies Needed:

- Paper bags

- Facial feature art pieces (googly eyes, etc.)
- Markers, crayons, etc.
- Popsicle sticks
- Other decorations!

Lessons learned:

- Participants explore negative experiences and feelings with their sibling.
- Participants learn it's okay to talk about the difficult moments that their siblings and they, themselves, may sometimes experience because of how they are acting.

While there are many good times, all sibling relationships have difficult moments. To better examine some of those times when your brother or sister can really make you angry, try making monsters! You can make paper bag puppets, or as in the photo above, you can have each child make a set of eyes and a mouth. Pre-cut the shapes and supply markers, crayons, etc., so that they can decorate. Add a Popsicle stick to the eyes and another to the mouth so they can be more easily held up to the face to use as a mask. Note the mouth can be held either with the smile or the frown. Have the children talk about when their sibling acts like a monster. Similarly, have the children say when they act like monsters to other family members!

15 minutes: Let's Act it Out

LET'S ACT IT OUT

Supplies Needed:

- Paper bags, enough for each participant to have two or more, depending on how many children are in the family
- Markers/pens, other things to decorate with, like yarn, glitter, paper cut-outs of glasses, noses, etc.
- Scissors
- Glue

Lessons learned:

- Participants will have the ability to walk through a situation in a way that allows them to gain some validation for their feelings and experiences, as well as learn some practical problem-solving strategies.
- Participants will benefit from the discussion and requisite growth around a particular topic.

Brothers and sisters will be able to make a paper bag hand puppet that represents themselves and another that represents their sibling with Down syndrome (they may want to make another one for another sibling).

Brothers and sisters can act out a good and bad interaction they have had with their sibling. This will encourage brothers and sisters to share in the good and bad experiences they have with their sibling. It will serve as a great jumping off point to launch the group into discussion about brothers' and sisters' experiences that may require some problem-solving, and also ones that require celebration! Facilitators should be prepared to talk about a lot of different situations and feelings; they can prepare by looking through the Topics section of this site!

Another activity that can be done to "act it out," is to have the brothers and sisters act out funny, happy, and/or difficult moments that occur with their friends or with their siblings' friends. This may help address situations that arise because the brothers' and sisters' friends don't understand Down syndrome that can often be pretty stressful for our brothers and sisters. For example, a brother or sister may act out one of their friends using the '**r-word**'. How do they react? What can they do? What do they feel--are those feelings okay? Or, they may act out their sibling trying to play with friends on the playground, but the other kids don't understand what their sibling is trying to do. How do they feel? How do they handle the situation? Why do other people act this way?

5 minutes: BREAK

15 minutes: Question Box
QUESTION BOX

Supplies Needed:

- Index cards
- Markers/pens
- Shoe box

Lessons learned:

- Participants will have the freedom to ask questions about Down syndrome and their sibling, specifically, that they may not normally ask

- Participants will get accurate answers to their questions about Down syndrome, learning good facts
- Participants will benefit from the discussion and requisite growth around a particular topic

The Question Box is a great activity that gives brothers and sisters the opportunity to anonymously write any questions they have about their sibling on an index card and drop it into a shoe box or bag positioned in the room. You may want to start with a time to write some questions down at the beginning of the Workshop and then follow up with some designated time throughout the rest of the Workshop. Brothers and sisters should also know that they can write questions throughout the Workshop, outside of the designated times, as well. It will be important to leave the index cards and pencils out for participants to use through the Workshop. At other times throughout the Workshop, assemble the brothers and sisters into a circle (different circles for each age group). Ask one of the participants to pull a question and read it out loud, and then you can ask for some advice from the other participants. Oftentimes, siblings can help each other and answer their own questions! Other times, you might need to jump in and offer some direction or reflections. Use these questions as opportunities to talk about some larger topics that are important to brothers and sisters. Make sure you create a safe environment so that brothers and sisters feel safe to share their thoughts and ask any questions there that they may have.

10 minutes: Closing Remarks

- Share with them *Benefits of Having a Sibling with Down Syndrome*
- Have them come up with their own list of benefits!

BENEFITS OF HAVING A SIBLING WITH DOWN SYNDROME

There is a long list of all the benefits of having a sibling with Down syndrome. Your sibling will show you things about the world and your life that you never would have learned except through them. We are a special group of people; I can promise you that. Things can be tough; there's no doubt about it. But your sibling will provide you with unconditional love and teachings about yourself and others. Siblings of people with Down syndrome listed the following things as just a few of the benefits they've gotten from being the sibling of someone with Down syndrome.

Some benefits that other siblings have come up with include:

- Someone to play with
- Happy
- Best friend
- Loving
- Kind
- Caring
- Fun

KEEP IN MIND...

1. Acknowledge the range of feelings that siblings may bring to the workshop.
2. Say what they feel is common—others experience that, too.
3. Give them practical things to do to remedy the situation.

RESOURCES TO CHECK OUT

1. Read up on different Topics to prepare for any questions that may arise!
2. Look under Activities to download worksheets and explore different games.
3. Check out Dr. Skotko & Sue Levine's book *Fasten Your Seatbelt: A Crash Course on Down Syndrome for Brothers and Sisters* for more helpful information!