



What is SibStrong?

SibStrong is a “by siblings, for siblings” organization for siblings of people with Autism and other intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families.

SibStrong works to provide communities, both in-person and digitally, where siblings can connect, share experiences and access information and resources. Every sibling is at a different place on their sibling path, and we believe there is value in bringing siblings together from across the spectrum of age and circumstances.

SibStrong Youth Program

The youth program provides community and support for younger siblings. The sessions or “gatherings” offer a space for siblings to get together with other brothers and sisters around their age to connect over shared experiences, discuss issues unique to siblings, ask questions and take part in fun activities.

During COVID, these gatherings have gone temporarily virtual, with the groups gathering on Zoom. The gatherings usually last about an hour, but with siblings eager to talk and connect, it’s not uncommon for the group conversations stretch to nearly two hours.

How it Works

What makes SibStrong unique to other sibling support programs is that youth sessions are facilitated almost exclusively by older siblings in their 20’s and 30’s. The value of the older siblings (*vetted and trained before participating*) comes in their ability to speak about and relate to the experiences of the younger siblings.

Depending on the size of the group, sessions generally begin with whole group activities before breaking into smaller discussion groups. We generally aim for a **3-1 younger sibling to older sibling** ratio for sessions.

We have found that the younger siblings have been particularly keen to ask questions about how the older siblings have managed different aspects of sibling life.

For new siblings joining SibStrong the key things we want them to keep in mind are:

- **There’s no right way to participate!** SibStrong is meant to be a relaxing space to meet and check-in with other sibs. Participate and talk as much of little as you like!
- **This is a safe sibling space.** What is said at SibStrong stays at SibStrong. We all have different lives and experiences. Anything said in the group stays in the group.
- **Have fun! Ask questions!** As siblings, we’ve spent a lot of time watch our brothers and sisters go to therapists and check-ins. We do not want SibStrong to be that. We want this to be as enjoyable as possible.

Overall benefits of the sessions include:

- Meeting other siblings of people with disabilities
- Developing a community of other children who share similar experiences to them

- A safe space for siblings to talk about their experiences—the good and the bad
- An opportunity to celebrate the unique role they play in the lives of their siblings
- Better understand disability and ways to talk about it to friends and peers
- Learn strategies for dealing with challenging situations
- Ask questions they may have about their role as the sibling of someone with a disability

SibStrong youth sessions have been taking place in the DC area for over a year and we have seen extremely positive feedback and responses from both participants and their parents.

Youth Feedback:

“It’s nice just to be around other siblings like me. I like spending time with you all.”

“I like hearing other people talk about their siblings, and also recognizing that all of our siblings are individual as are all of us, and getting some validation for our struggles.”

“I enjoyed it very much, going to SibStrong is very helpful.”

Parent Feedback:

“She really enjoyed it, and I think it is really important and almost comforting for our kiddos to know that there are so many other kids/siblings that have very similar struggles.”

“Thank you again for the great SibStrong workshop yesterday! [She] can't wait until the next one. I really appreciate what you are doing. It is so FANTASTIC!!!”

“I think [he] got a lot out of it. He initially told me in the car that the group was talking about how they talk about their siblings with their friends. It prompted a conversation between [my son] and I about his comfort talking about [his brother’s] disability with people which is something we really haven’t talked about.”

Program Information

Please visit SibStrong.org to learn more and sign-up to receive future updates. If you have any questions please reach out to Walter Suskind, the founder of SibStrong at wksuskind@gmail.com.