

## The Invisible Sibling

As a Developmental Pediatrician, I find myself dealing not only with children with autism but also with the family as a whole. In due course of regular visits, we start developing a mutual bonding with all the members of family. It is heart-warming to see how our parents mature. Their journey is definitely an uphill task. Whether it is organizing finances for therapies, providing intervention, finding the right resources for their child's school or societal acceptance, they learn to tread the hard path gradually.

All along this course are also the other siblings who are developmentally normal. He or she is gradually also waging a silent battle within – trying to grapple with reality – and this battle sometimes goes unnoticed. The following poem that I have penned is written from the perspective of a little sister who tags along with her parents and brother for routine visits. It attempts to present her growing maturity and realistic understanding of her younger brother who has autism. This poem is dedicated to all siblings of children with autism.

### The Invisible Sibling

I'm nine, I love being at school and with friends.  
 Playing, reading, dancing are a few of my hobbies.  
 I enjoy a laugh, share a secret and sing away carefree.  
 My tiny world's nest is my tightly knit family  
 and my home.

My little brother is five; he has autism: I heard this word  
 first when I was six.  
 Is that why he was fussy over foods, toys and  
 pushed me away?  
 Is that why he'd break my favorite doll and didn't know

how to say sorry?  
 I thought I didn't like him; he's keeping Mummy and  
 Daddy so busy.  
 Sometimes they didn't notice me at all, missed my  
 important dates at school.  
 I'd think why am I the invisible sibling?  
 Am I really so trivial?

I was wrong then, as things cleared soon like a mist  
 Mummy, Daddy told me he's different,  
 he loves differently.  
 He comes near me and smells me; he means to say  
 he missed me  
 I have to give him a high-five to say "I love you" and  
 not briskly pat his cheek.  
 He loved the paper plane I made, cause he frisked past  
 "wheee wheee."  
 He twiddles my hair round his finger; it means he's upset  
 with the noises around.

Mummy, Daddy and I are all learning together.  
 We learn how to teach him from the sessions he goes to.  
 We teach "I want, I don't like, give me, please,  
 more, and thank you."  
 We are using pictures, photos, cards and timetables;  
 he's learning fast, he's even repeating words after us now.  
 I'm sure he will soon learn to say "I love you."  
 I wish to make you all learn to see him just as we do  
 See him, read his mind and teach him to read yours.  
 Our little bundle of joy, he's more visible to me  
 now than ever  
 My family picture: a happy, complete one now!

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