

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR SIBLINGS**

The brothers and sisters of young persons diagnosed with spina bifida are important to our clinic team. They need special consideration, information and concern. Adaptations to living with their sibling with spina bifida must be made over a lifetime, and can be difficult. We would like to encourage you to discuss issues with us as they arise. This is sound treatment to prevent major, long-term problems in the future. In addition, we will endeavor to share information and suggestions at appropriate stages in your child's development.

The following are a few general suggestions that you may find helpful:

- Keep in tune with each child's needs. Parents of children with spina bifida can easily put all of their energy into this child and inadvertently and unintentionally neglect the rest of the family.
- Let each sibling know that they are unique and important too, each in their own way.
- It is important that siblings discover that they are not the only ones with a brother or sister with special needs. Family get-togethers with other families who have children with spina bifida, or sibling support group involvement are two possibilities for handling this concern.
- Ask your other children how they feel about their special sibling. Talk about their fears, frustrations, embarrassments, love and pride. Some of the negative feelings can be alleviated just by talking. If not, seek professional child or family counseling.
- Don't put excessive responsibility on siblings. They do need responsibilities, but also need a normal childhood. It is unfair to cheat them out of a normal childhood by expecting them to act like adults before their time.
- Try to designate a time or plan a special event for each of your children, i.e. going to a museum or children's show without their siblings.
- Divide and share household responsibilities among all family members. Make a plan of who can do what and stick to it, rotating chores every so often. Everyone can feel needed and no one will feel "picked on."
- Sit down and take a few deep breaths when angry or exasperated. It is important to calm down, clear your head, identify the problem and consider possible solutions before you discuss the issues with your family.
- Celebrate each child's achievements with some special recognition. It does not take a major production and by doing so, it will give your child, as well as other family members, a feeling of confidence and pride.