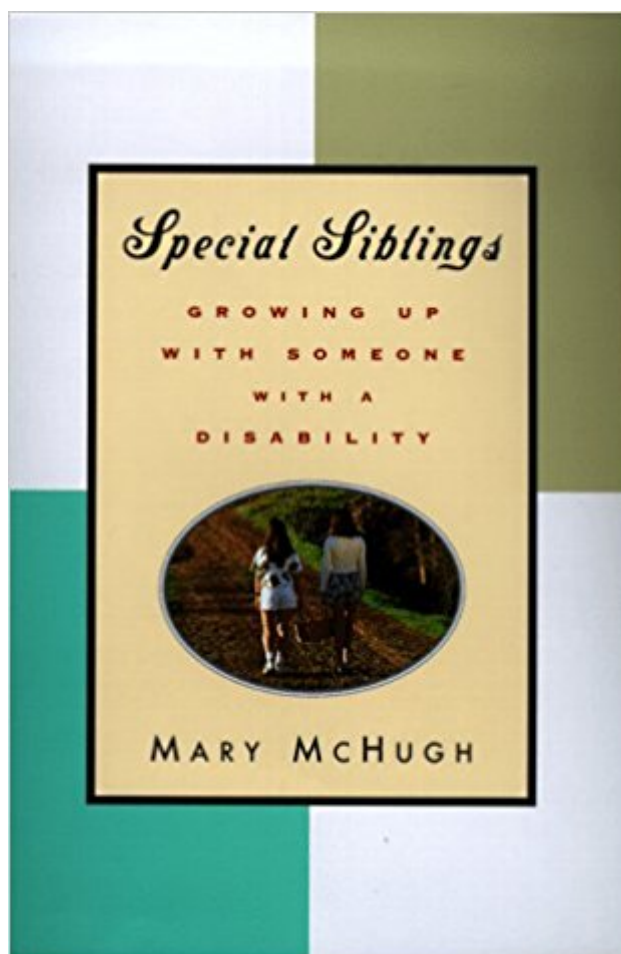


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# Special Siblings: Growing Up With Someone With A Disability



## Synopsis

Along with the insights from experts, Mary McHugh shares her personal experiences of growing up with a mentally disabled brother.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

YA-A look at what it is like to be a sibling of someone with a physical, mental, or emotional disability. McHugh's brother has both cerebral palsy and mental retardation, a fact that has shaped every aspect of her life. In the course of writing this book, she spoke to siblings ranging in age from 6 to 76 years of age who expressed feelings that ran the gamut from compassion to resentment. She writes with painful honesty and includes information about research studies, interviews with experts, and the experiences and stories of many siblings. The book covers important topics such as coping with anger, embarrassment with new friends, and dealing with the long-term care of the disabled sibling. McHugh concludes with a resource section that includes videotapes, newsletters, support groups, and organizations. This title could be of great interest, help, and comfort to readers who are looking for both information and encouragement from people who understand how they might be feeling. Peggy Bercher, Fairfax County Public Library, VA Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.

For siblings of those with physical, mental, or emotional disabilities, here is helpful advice, comfort, and the company of others who've been there. McHugh (formerly an editor at *Woman's World* and *Cosmopolitan*, and a frequent *New York Times* contributor) grew up with a mentally disabled brother

for whom she became responsible as an adult after their mother died. McHugh doesn't shrink from the tough issues, even when looking at her own actions. Mostly, she reports, she blocked her brother and his problems out of her life as much as possible. So on one level, this is about McHugh's own journey viewed wrenchingly from another angle when one of her own children becomes blind and has a leg amputated as a result of complications from diabetes. But moving on from her own experience, McHugh offers information, understanding, and resources for others, on a wide range of issues: from childhood fears about the parents marriage, to troubles in ones own marriage caused by caring for a disabled sibling, to the urge to somehow make it all better ("For a sibling, there is nothing more painful than watching your mother's heart break because one of her children is wounded"). McHugh considers needs and problems for each age and developmental group, from childhood on. Real help, real comfort for those personally affected. -- Copyright ©1999, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

First of all, I really wish that people who have not grown up with a disabled sibling would not write negative reviews of this book because they just don't know what it is like. My sister had polio and her illness and subsequent operations took all of my families' resources both financial and emotional. I grew up thinking that I was unimportant and that maybe if I was sick too, I would get attention. My earliest thoughts were those of wishing that I would just die so I didn't have to feel so bad/guilty all the time. Kids that grow up with disabled siblings often feel that they did something wrong to cause the disability. My middle sister and I both felt that way, yet we weren't even born when it happened. Ms. McHugh has written an incredibly honest book that will be greatly appreciated by anyone else in this situation. We live in a world of silence and isolation, how can you ever complain when you can walk, talk, hear, etc. You would be considered extremely selfish. The life of a sibling of a disabled person is very distorted. Thank you, Ms. McHugh for your courage.

I bought this book because I have a child with a disability, and I wanted to do what I can to be helpful to my three other children. It was a wonderful read! It reassured me, which is something all mothers need a lot of. It also reminded me that vigilance about sibling excesses is in order. After reading it, I reminded my children that they don't have to grow up to be superstars in some kind of effort to compensate for what my one child lacks. I enjoyed the author's willingness to be so honest about her feelings, yet even when revealing negative feelings, she asserted a positive spin by contrasting her feelings with more positive feelings of others. It's clear that much of her difficulty had to do with being raised in a different time -- when there was little help, and when disability was

considered shameful and secret. My favorite section of this book is the discussion of the common phenomenon of siblings entering the helping professions as adults. She has a fresh and interesting take on this topic.

McHugh's book puts a new perspective out there for siblings of the disabled to come to grips with many of the endemic problems that this population of people (myself being one of them) deals with. Great for adults in understanding where they are coming from and really great for kids in understanding why they feel differently about siblings than their friends might. While there are other books out there, this one puts a bit of a "feel-good spin" on having siblings with disabilities, particularly in the last chapter. Sometimes you need to wallow in the frustration for a while and understand the negative consequences and their impact before you can see the positives, which is the only reason that this book gets four of five stars - aside from that, this is an excellent, helpful book that does a fantastic job of explaining the dilemma of having a sibling with a disability.

I never knew that other siblings felt this way! After years of dealing with guilt, jealousy, and overprotectiveness, I finally realized that I was not alone. Best of all, knowing that other sibs experience the same things, I don't feel the need to justify these feelings anymore. This book is a great starting point for sibs who want to/need to understand how having a "special sibling" has affected their life. FYI: Your special sibling doesn't necessarily have to have a obvious physical special need. I believe that sibs of those who suffer from mental illnesses will also find this book comforting and familiar.

This is the first time, I have read a book, that I related to. I always felt so alone in my experiences as a child, and it is actually a surprise, that others have felt the way I felt. A relief too - that others have had similar experiences. I am a sibling of a disabled sister. This book is a must read if you are a sibling of a disabled sibling or a parent.

I wish my ex-husband would read this book! I would like to think that siblings of families today have a better time of it--but everything Mary said fit in exactly with my ex-husband's family. And the issues begun in childhood carried into adulthood and affected all his relationships! Mary writes very honestly about the ambivalence (which may be too mild a word) of living with a sibling with a disability. The guilt, the anger, the loss of attention....it was all there for him, just as it happened to Mary.

=Special Siblings= is a small masterpiece focusing on both the world of the developmentally disabled and the often-forgotten world of their ``normal'' siblings. McHugh's unflinchingly honest, warm, empathetic look at the mixed emotions and unique responsibilities ``normal'' siblings face should be a standard reference book not only for those working with the developmentally disabled, but everyone out there who knows someone with a special sibling...and everyone out there who doesn't.

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