

# **Bibliotherapy and Siblings of Children with Disabilities**

**Michigan Therapeutic Recreation Association  
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## **Session Description**

- The effect of bibliotherapy upon siblings of children with disabilities was studied. The research entailed pre posttest surveys of parents regarding perceptions of their children's ability to cope with complicated feelings regarding their sibling. Additionally, qualitative data was collected throughout the study that examined awareness of feelings, ability to cope with feelings, and relationships among sibs. This preliminary review is meant to provide the participant with an overview of the effects of bibliotherapy upon siblings. The research in its entirety will be presented at the national ATRA conference in Orlando FL. In 2017.

## Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this session, participants will be able to:

- Identify three basic premises of bibliotherapy.
- Describe at least three sibling issues as documented in the literature regarding having a sibling with a disability.
- State how to combine the ideas of bibliotherapy and sibling issues to build research justification for the use of bibliotherapy by recreational therapists.

## Session Outline

1. Introduction
2. Bibliotherapy: basis and foundations for intervention
3. Sibling Issues: issues and challenges of having a sibling with a disability
4. Research structure
5. Research implementation
6. Preliminary outcomes
7. Implications for Recreational Therapists
8. Wrap up and questions

# Bibliotherapy

## Definition

- Means “healing with books” (Pardek, 2005) – from Greek
- Literature that is used therapeutically in a purposeful way to help children understand both themselves and how to cope with problems that they face (Kurtts & Gvaigan, 2008)

## Purpose

- Help people solve and learn to solve problems
- Identify alternative solutions to problems
- Identify and express feelings and thoughts
- Learn to cope with situations

## Bibliotherapy – Evidence-Based Benefits



- Facilitate expression of emotions
- Teach about specific disabilities
- Provide perspective that one is not alone in their experience
- Identification of coping skills
- Understanding of how to solve a problem
- Develop skills such as empathy, respect and acceptance
- Verbalize thoughts and feelings

## Bibliotherapy – Components & Process

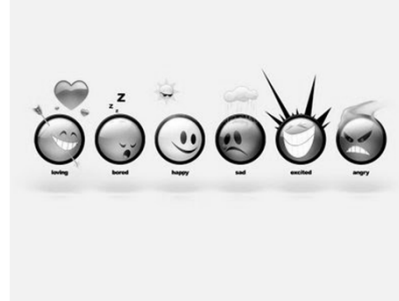
- **Assessment** – individual needs, readiness to deal with and talk about problem
- **Planning** – book selection, age appropriateness of books and activities
  - Open-ended questions
  - Journaling or writing activities
  - Art projects
  - Role playing
  - Problem solving activities
  - Games
- **Implementation** – introduction of the book by setting the stage; activities related to topic; processing questions
- **Evaluation** – effectiveness of intervention; participant responses
- **Documentation** – assessment – pre and post, responses, observations

## Sibling Issues

- There are many challenges and joys that siblings of children with disabilities experience.
- The challenges are well documented in the literature and usually occur in early and middle childhood.
- Most occur in the form of issues related to coping.
- By college age, most sibs have more strengths related to increased empathy, precocious independence, clear priorities, keen awareness of prejudice and choose helping professions as careers (Roos, 2002).

## Coping Issues and Siblings

- Guilt
- Sorrow
- Embarrassment
- Anger
- Over identification
- Pressure to Excel
- Behavioral Reactions
- Frightened/Confused



## Effective Sibling Interventions

- Roos (2002), Meyer (1993), Strobel (2011) concur:
  - Sibs need:
    - Factual information about sibs condition
    - Ability to strengthen own identity
    - Do ordinary things with peers and establish relationships
    - To know that feelings of anger and resentment are acceptable and inevitable
    - To meet other sibs in a relaxed setting
    - To understand how other sibs are handling situations
    - Have the ability to discuss alternatives openly and honestly

## Sib Shops

- Sib shops have been long utilized as peer support and information support groups that assist children, teens and young adults to increase awareness of their sibs unique, lifelong and ever changing concerns (Sibling Support Project, 2017)
  - Should be comprised of at least 60% pure recreation and socialization
1. Promote self-esteem
  2. Provide an atmosphere conducive to promoting empathy among peers
  3. Provide a catalyst for discussion and learning
  4. Allow sibs the opportunity to have fun physically and socially
  5. Answer questions effectively and empathetically
  6. Get participants actively involved using games and initiatives
  7. Provide an atmosphere that allows sibs to feel comfortable and safety
  8. Provide information about disabilities brought in by outside people

## Research Structure

- Identification of research question and target population
  - Children 8 – 12 years old who have a sibling with a disability
  - Does bibliotherapy help children who have a sibling with a disability to identify their feelings and coping strategies?
- Examination and identification of assessment
  - Selected *Sibling Inventory of Behavior* (Schaefer & Edgerton, 1981)
  - Questions related to companionship/involvement with sibling; empathy/concern; teaching/directiveness; rivalry; conflict/aggression

## Research Structure



- Sought out potential partnerships with other organizations
- Program planning
- Marketing and recruitment of participants
  - 7 children, ages 7 – 12 years old
  - 3 males, 4 females
  - Sibs with autism and CP
- Scheduling of sessions
- Recruiting students

## Implementation - Group

- Structure: 3 - 2 hour sessions in consecutive weeks
- CTRS provides bibliotherapy content and facilitates experiential activity (40% of time)
- TR students provide 60% Recreation, Social and Team building activities with the kids



## Group Schedule

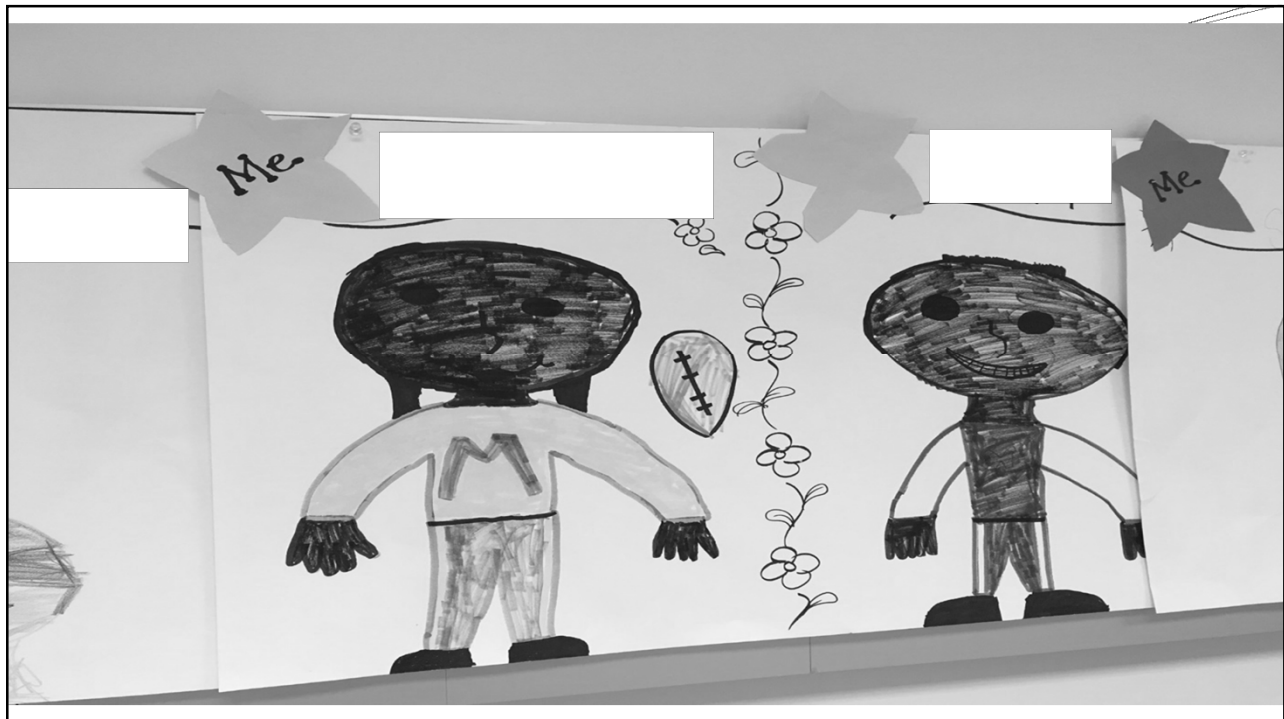
- Meet and greet
- Welcome and warm up: Student led
- Bibliotherapy Components: CTRS led
  - Introduction of topic
  - Book
  - Activity
- Snack
- Recreation Component: Student led
  - 2 – 3 games or interactive activities
- Good-byes and touch base with parents during pick up





## Session 1: Therapeutic Activity

- **Book:** Peralta, S. (2002). *All about my brother*. Shawnee Mission, KS: Autism Asperger Publishing Company.
- **Goals:**
  1. Rapport building
  2. Introduction of selves and sibs
  3. Identify commonalities among peers
  4. Identify common coping issues among peers
- **Art Activity:** Poster drawing - This is me and This is my brother or sister
- **Discussion:** Introduction of posters and identification of commonalities



## Session 2: Therapeutic Activity

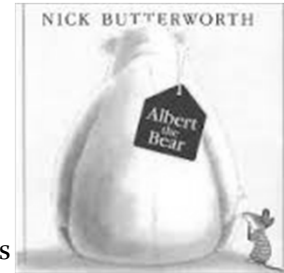
- **Book:** Cave, K. & Maland, N. (2003). *You've got dragons*. Atlanta, GA: Peachtree Publishers, LTD.
  - Makes idea more concrete that issues/problems associated with having a sibling with a disability can seem big and scary like a dragon, but they can be "tamed" by using specific tools and techniques.
- **Goals:**
  1. Feelings identification
  2. Preliminary identification of coping skills
- **Art Activity:** color and name dragon
- **Discussion:**
  - Identification of problems or issues associated with those feelings
  - Coping skills alternatives identified
  - Discussion about choosing alternatives





## Session 3: Therapeutic Activity

- **Book:** Butterworth, N. (2002). *Albert the bear*. Great Britain, Harper Collins Publishers.
  - Details feelings that a child might encounter, and then various active, fun, and social ways to cope with sometimes challenging events/feelings.
- **Goals:**
  1. Feelings identification
  2. Identification of personal coping skills and activities
- **Art Activity:** magazine scavenger hunt for activities enjoy and coping techniques
- **Discussion:**
  - Identification of problems or issues associated with those feelings
  - Coping skills alternatives identified
  - Specific individual coping techniques explored



## Preliminary Outcomes

### Quantitative

- Anticipate some changes in pre/post test responses related to parental perceptions of the child's identification of feelings and coping strategies

### Qualitative

- Themes from children
  - Coping techniques
  - Identifying feelings
  - Peer relationships
- Themes from parents
  - Increased empathy towards sib
  - More positive interactions with sib
  - Peer support

# Implications for Recreational Therapists

- Need to establish EBP for RTs working with children and families
- Develop protocols for bibliotherapy with all populations for RT to use
- Definite needs among siblings of children with disabilities
- Additional need for access and increased services for families that have a child with disabilities
  - Are families a new area for RT services?
  - Importance of families to recreation and leisure, as well as overall functioning
- What ideas do you have?

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