



Grandparents and Siblings

Family Ties

When a child is born missing a limb or undergoes amputation due to an accident or medical cause the entire family is affected including siblings and other close family members like grandparents. Here are some tips to help parents in addressing the issues siblings face, as well as some tips to help grandparents.

Siblings

- Be open with brothers and sisters about the amputation. Explain the amputation in simple terms appropriate for the age of the child.
- Young children have vivid imaginations and sometimes think they have done something to cause the amputation, fear the same thing may happen to them, or are simply worried about the sibling with the amputation. Provide plenty of reassurance early on that everything is okay and make sure they understand about the amputation.
- Encourage siblings to share their concerns and ask questions. By being open with a brother or a sister, parents pass on their positive attitude towards living with an amputation.
- Sometimes, because of doctors appointments and prosthetic fittings you spend more time with the child amputee. Set aside some “special time” alone with other siblings to share an activity they enjoy.
- Treat the child amputee and his/her siblings equally by dividing chores according to age and ability. Firstly, siblings will see that no favouritism or special allowances are being made towards the amputee child. Secondly, it gives the amputee child more confidence as they take on and accomplish tasks like their brothers and sisters.

Grandparents

- Some grandparents may initially have difficulty coming to terms with the amputation. These emotions should be discussed and dealt with as quickly as possible. The parents and grandchild will best be helped by a positive and supportive outlook. It will not help the parents or the grandchild if you pretend the amputation does not exist. If necessary talk to a trusted friend or keep a journal as a way of arriving at acceptance.
- As a grandparent(s) you will experience similar emotions to the child’s parents and will go through the same stages of adjustment. Children often look to their parents for support no matter how old they are – the parents of the child amputee may naturally come to you, their parent(s), for support and assistance.
- Talk to your son and daughter and let them know you are there to support them.
- Grandparents are often the anchor of the family unit and as such play a major role in the adjustment of the whole family.
- Grandparents who are actively involved with hospital visits and accompany their grandchild for visits to the doctor or prosthetist often feel more at ease with the amputation because they are more informed and knowledgeable about what to expect.
- Your grandchild is a child first, the amputation is secondary – it is very helpful to focus and recognize your grandchild’s natural talents and abilities.

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- Balance your time and attention between all your grandchildren, neither paying too little or too much attention to the child with the amputation.

