

## School choices

There are many factors that influence where a parent decides to send their child to school.

When one or more children have a disability the decision can become more complex. Whilst it might be easier for all children to go the same school, there may be times when a child with disability will have their needs met more effectively at a different school from siblings.

On the other hand, some parents make the decision to send their children to separate schools as they think it is better for a sibling to be able to develop their own identity separately from the child with disability.

Below are some issues for both parents and schools to consider when looking at the different options.

- Will the school be able to cater for the needs of each child?
- It can be helpful if the school knows the whole family and this is easier if the children attend the same school
- There can be a sense of community if children attend the same school
- Siblings can readily share each other's achievements if they are at the same school
- Siblings may find comfort in being able to check on their brother or sister, but they may also spend more time with them and miss out on developing independent friendships
- Siblings may find that it is difficult to develop their own identity eg they may be always known as 'Johnny's sister'
- Siblings may feel greater responsibility for a child with disability if they are at the same school and it can be easy for school staff to call on siblings when there are difficulties with the child with disability
- Siblings may be subject to more teasing or bullying if they are at the same school
- Siblings may need extra support to cope with embarrassment if the child with disability has difficult behaviours

It can be helpful if parents and school staff can discuss together the needs of all the children.

If brothers and sisters are able to develop their own identity, have their own friends and are not burdened by responsibility, then it can be of great benefit for everyone if children attend the same school. If children are together, it is crucial that schools and families consider the needs of all children. The Student Support Plan for children with disability (NEP in some States) provides an ideal opportunity to monitor possible issues for siblings as well.

It is important to respect the sibling's need for privacy in all of these discussions.

*If you have stories about experiences with schooling decisions please share them with us.*