

## LINKAGES BETWEEN FAMILY COHESION AND SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS IN FAMILIES RAISING A CHILD WITH A DISABILITY

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Family research has often offered mixed descriptions of the experiences of siblings of children with disabilities - some harmful and some beneficial. However, this research has rarely examined sibling relationships and how those relationships relate to other family variables such as cohesion. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between family cohesion and sibling relationships in families raising a child with a disability. The following research questions were asked: (1) Are there differences between mother and father perceptions of family cohesion and sibling relationships? (2) What are the relationships among family cohesion and sibling relationships in families raising a child with disabilities? 72 mothers and fathers raising a child with a disability and a child without a disability) completed the Family Cohesion subscale of Bloom's family functioning measure and Shafer's Sibling Inventory of Behavior. Results indicated no differences in mother's and father's perception of cohesion and sibling relationships, as previous research suggests. Two significant relationships were found between mothers' ratings of cohesion and two types of sibling relationships: empathy and avoidance. Thus when mothers rated families as having greater cohesion, there was a stronger level of empathy and lower avoidance behavior in the sibling relationship. Family practitioners can benefit from this information by creating programs to help strengthen family cohesion which might in turn also strengthen sibling relationships. Practitioners might also provide programs go help strengthen sibling relationships which in turn could strengthen family cohesion.

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