

# Family Context: Understanding the Importance of Siblings

**RS**  
Research  
Summarized

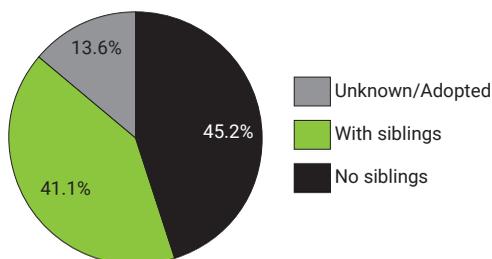
## Developmental Perspectives

Families play an important role in influencing the educational and occupational outcomes of deaf children.<sup>1</sup> Although we know that parents play an important role in shaping deaf individuals' future, less is known about the role of siblings in families with deaf children.<sup>2,3</sup> Sibling relationships are important because they are believed to influence relationships with peers.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, early relationships with siblings may have important implications for deaf individuals' functioning later in school and on the job.

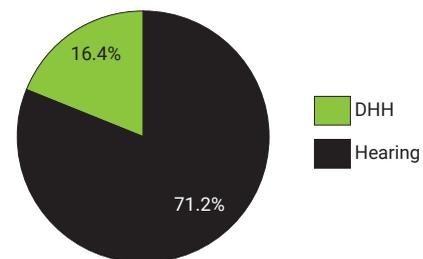
## Prevalence of Siblings for Deaf Children

The graphs below provide a national snapshot of the percentage of deaf students who have siblings and the hearing status of those siblings. These graphs are based on data collected from more than 37,000 students who were surveyed by the Gallaudet Research Institute.<sup>4</sup> The second graph shows that deaf individuals are more likely to have a hearing sibling than a deaf sibling, but the proportion of deaf children with deaf siblings is higher than in the overall population.

**Proportion of DHH Children With a Sibling**



**Proportion of Siblings Who Are DHH**



## Influence of Siblings and Sibling Relationships

- Many of the studies in this area focus on the hearing sibling and his or her psychological adjustment.<sup>5,6,7,8,9</sup> Much remains to be explored in terms of sibling relationships and their effects on deaf individuals.<sup>2</sup>
- There is little difference in the psychological adjustment between children who have a deaf sibling and those with a hearing sibling.<sup>8,9</sup>
- For families with children with disabilities, whole family functioning and access to financial resources are likely to influence sibling adjustment.<sup>10</sup>
- Deaf students in high school with deaf siblings performed better than their peers on nonverbal tests and language tests.<sup>11</sup>
- Research suggests that hearing parents with more than one deaf child may feel more empowered to advocate for the youngest deaf child due to experiences with their oldest deaf child.<sup>12</sup>

## How may family structure influence sibling relationships?

- Birth order may play an important role in sibling relationships. Relationships between deaf and hearing siblings tend to be more positive when the deaf child is the oldest in the family.<sup>2</sup>



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- Feelings of closeness between siblings may be affected by their hearing status, as deaf siblings tend to feel closer to each other than deaf and hearing siblings.<sup>3</sup> These feelings of closeness may be influenced by whether or not siblings share the same communication modality.<sup>12</sup>
- Though deaf children of deaf parents tend to have higher self-esteem than deaf children of hearing parents, the hearing status of siblings does not seem to influence deaf children's self-esteem.<sup>3</sup>
- Parents' attitudes may influence sibling's relationships, in that sibling relationships are slightly more positive if parents have no anxiety about deafness.<sup>2</sup>

## References

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- <sup>5</sup> Barr, J., & McLeod, S. (2010). They never see how hard it is to be me: Siblings' observations of strangers, peers, and family. *International Journal of Speech-Language Pathology, 12*(2), 162–171. doi:10.3109/17549500903434133
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- <sup>10</sup> Emerson, E., Hatton, C., Blacher, J., Llewellyn, G., Graham, H. (2006). Socio-economic position, household composition, health status and indicators of the well-being of mothers of children with and without intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Intellectual Disabilities Research, 50*, 862–73.
- <sup>11</sup> Kusché, C. A., Greenberg, M. T., & Garfield, T. S. (1983). Nonverbal intelligence and verbal achievement in deaf adolescents: an examination of heredity and environment. *American Annals of the Deaf, 128*(4), 458–466. doi:10.1353/aad.2012.1028
- <sup>12</sup> Cawthon, S., & the pn2 RES team. (2012). *Pepnet 2 needs assessment final report*. Austin, TX.



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