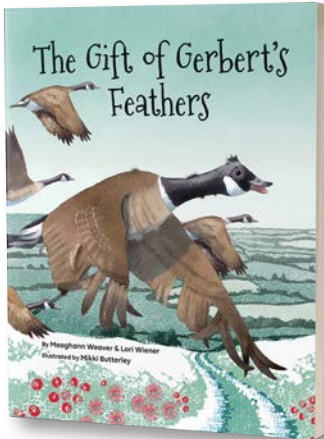




Magination Press Quick Tip: Supporting Grieving Siblings



Parents of children with serious illnesses face many challenges supporting their child through treatment and navigating the eventual outcome of the illness. If the family has more than one child, the parents also find themselves supporting the siblings as they experience their brother or sister's illness, and sometimes, their death.

The authors of Magination Press's *The Gift of Gerbert's Feathers*, Dr. Meaghann Weaver and Dr. Lori Wiener offer these insights and tips for supporting siblings of seriously ill children:

When a child is diagnosed with a serious illness, everyone in the family is impacted. It can be especially difficult for brothers and sisters whose pain and suffering can feel invisible compared to what is happening to their ill sibling. Some siblings feel that their own needs, wants, and desires are not being valued as highly as those of their ill brother or sister. They can struggle trying to balance their love for their family and tremendous worry for their sibling with feelings of jealousy, anger, or frustration.

Sometimes siblings secretly worry that they caused the illness due to something they thought, said, or did. It is important that the sibling is reassured that the sickness is not their fault. Sometimes siblings feel guilty for being healthy when their brother or sister is sick. Others may feel guilty for being jealous of the attention their sick sibling is getting from parents, grandparents, neighbors, and others. These feelings are often magnified if their siblings die from disease. They should be reassured that these are normal emotions, and that it's not their fault.

To support a child who has lost a brother or sister, try these ideas:

- Allow children to speak openly and ask questions about their loss
- Provide children with age-appropriate information about understandable and healthy emotional reactions to grief
- Facilitate a consistent routine including school attendance and home routines like regular family meals and bedtime

- Encourage children to maintain a relationship with their sibling through the practice of continuing bonds such as talking about memories, looking at pictures, creating a memory box, or visiting favorite shared places

These tips are partially excerpted from the Guide for Parents & Caregivers in Magination Press Book, *The Gift of Gerbert's Feathers*, by Meaghann Weaver, MD, MPH, FAAP, and Lori Wiener, PhD, DCSW, to be published in February 2020.

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