

The Ionia County ISD Autism Spectrum Disorder Program is pleased to announce SIBSHOP, an exciting five week program just for school aged (K-12) brothers and sisters of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. The group is scheduled to meet on Tuesdays from 6:30 – 7:30 PM at Ionia ISD. We will meet on the following dates:

- February 23
- March 2
- March 16
- March 23
- March 30

At SIBSHOP, brothers and sisters will:

- Meet other brothers and sisters of children with ASD
- Have fun
- Talk about their brothers and sisters with others who really know what it's like to have a sibling with a disability
- Make new friends
- Learn about autism spectrum disorders, and
- Have some more fun!

Siblings share a special relationship and know each other in ways no one else will ever know them. Most brothers and sisters experience a wide range of feelings towards their siblings; therefore it is not unusual for siblings of people with special needs to also go through a variety of feelings towards their brother or sisters. However, there can be some feelings that are unusual or concerning. Research shows that some of the feelings siblings may experience include:

- Over identification
- Embarrassment
- Guilt
- Isolation, loneliness, and loss
- Resentment
- Increased responsibilities
- Pressure to achieve

SIBSHOP will provide brothers and sisters with opportunities to address their feelings and concerns through peer support and education. Siblings need open communication, developmentally appropriate information, time to work through their feelings, to learn skills of interaction with their brother/sister, and to learn strategies for dealing with questions or comments from peers and others in the community.

Additionally, there will also be meetings at the same time for parents to discuss sibling issues. This will

be an opportunity to get to know other families who experience similar challenges and successes.

The SIBSHOP group will be led by Abbey Mix, a School Social Worker and Sabine Schafer and Toni McPherson, ASD Mentors with the ASD program. The parent group will be facilitated by Joanne Fornusek and Katie Hettinga, also Social Workers with the program.

Please contact the ASD Program Administrative Assistant, Catherine Sage, at 616-527-4900 ext. 1510 to register for the groups or for further information. Child care for your student with ASD will be available, but must be prearranged when you register.

We are very excited to begin this adventure and hope to see you at SIBSHOP!

Sincerely,

Joanne Fornusek
Katie Hettinga
Abbey Mix
Sabine Schafer
Toni McPherson