

The Sibling's Guide

UNUSUAL EXPERIENCES

Your sibling and unusual experiences

A warm, plain-language guide for the brother or sister of someone going through unusual experiences: stay a sibling rather than a nurse, and know where to get help, for them and for you.

Who this is for: the brother or sister of someone going through unusual experiences.

Cited: NICE, the NHS and peer-reviewed research, including a study from India.

Languages: English, Hindi, Marathi, and Kannada.

Read it free at weave.clinic/family

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WHEN THE HOUSE TILTS

The load you did not choose

IN SHORT

When a brother or sister starts having unusual experiences, the whole family shifts around them. If home feels different and heavier, that feeling is accurate. You did not choose this load, and naming it is the first step to carrying it differently.

Maybe your brother stopped coming out of his room. Maybe your sister began to whisper that the neighbours were watching her. Maybe there was a night of shouting, a hurried trip to a doctor, and a lot of closed-door talk you were not part of. After that, home was not quite the same.

The family's attention now flows one way. Plans bend around the good weeks and the hard weeks. Relatives ask questions nobody wants to answer. You did not choose any of this, and you are carrying some of it anyway. Brothers and sisters can feel this strain too. In one small study of families, siblings reported more distress and burden than parents did.



Meera, outside her brother's door, learning that his world has changed.

Meera is 16. She lives in Pune with her parents, her grandmother and her brother Arjun, who is 21. Last year Arjun began hearing a voice when no one was there. He became sure that people at his college were talking about him. He stopped sleeping, and he stopped laughing at her jokes. Meera started coming home quietly, checking his door, keeping her own news small. Nobody asked her to. It just became her job.

This booklet puts no label on your sibling. Only a doctor can say what is happening to them. It is here to help you understand what you are living through, and what you have been carrying.

REMEMBER

If home feels heavier since your sibling became unwell, you are not imagining it, and you are not being dramatic. Naming it plainly, even just to yourself, is the first step to standing up straight inside it.

2

IT IS ILLNESS, NOT CHOICE

What your sibling is going through

IN SHORT

Your sibling may be hearing, seeing or believing things that others do not. To them it can feel very real. They did not pick this, and you did not cause it.

Your sibling may hear a voice when no one is speaking. They may see things others do not. Or they may hold a strong belief that nobody else in the family shares. To them, this can feel very real. Often they cannot tell that it is not.

These experiences can be frightening and distressing for your sibling. They can also change how your sibling behaves. So the brother or sister you knew may act differently, or grow suspicious of people. Try not to take it as them rejecting you. Violence is fairly uncommon in people with these experiences. They are more likely to be harmed by others than to harm anyone.

Your sibling did not choose this, and you did not cause it. It is a health problem, not a punishment or a curse. Treatment exists for it, with medicine, talking therapies and practical support.

Real to them

not pretending

What your sibling hears or believes can feel very real to them. Arguing does not shift a belief that feels unshakeable.

Higher, not certain

a raised chance, not a sentence

A family link raises your own chance. More likely does not mean it will happen.

Because these experiences can run in families, you may quietly wonder: will this happen to me? That is a fair question, and it deserves an honest answer. Your chance is higher than that of someone with no family link. But higher means more likely, not certain.

Some things are in your hands. Stay away from ganja and similar drugs. Ganja is one of several drugs known to trigger these experiences. Protect your sleep too, especially around exams. Lack of sleep can also trigger them in some people. If you ever feel worried about yourself, tell an adult you trust. If you feel distressed and everyday life is slipping, guidelines ask doctors to see you without delay.

For months I checked myself every night for signs. Asking my brother's doctor about my own fear was the first time I slept properly.

Meera, sister, 16

Separating the illness from your sibling helps too. You can be angry at what it has taken from your family, and still love the person underneath. You do not have to pick one.

3

THE LOAD YOU CARRY

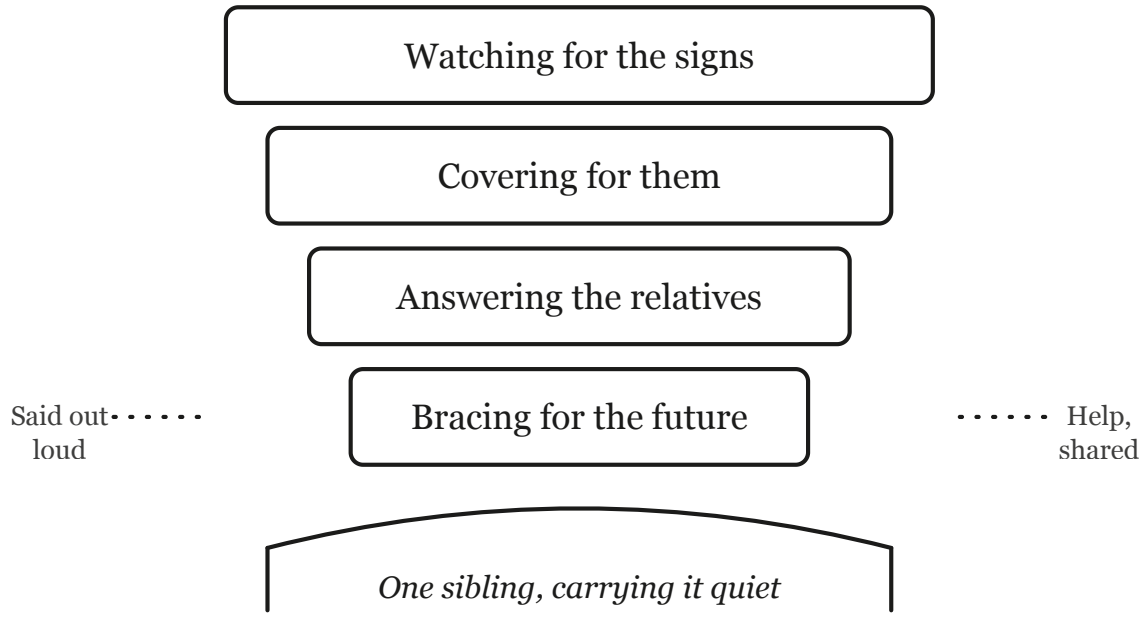
The work nobody sees

IN SHORT

Siblings often carry a hidden load: watching for signs, covering for their brother or sister, answering relatives, and bracing for what comes next. A load carried in silence gets heavier. Saying it out loud takes some of the weight off.

You may watch your sibling closely for the first sign of a bad turn. Are they sleeping? Are they talking to someone who is not there? You may cover for them when cousins visit, or make excuses to the neighbours. You may answer the same questions from relatives again and again. All of this is work, even if nobody calls it that.

You may also have grown up faster than your friends. You took on jobs at home that were never meant to be yours. You kept your own problems small so the family had one less worry. People called you mature, when really you were carrying more than your age. If that sounds like you, it is not you being soft. It is a lot to carry at any age.



The hidden load a sibling carries, and the weight that lifts when it is said out loud and shared.

Watching for signs and covering for them: work nobody sees.

Answering relatives, and keeping the family's secret.

Bracing for the future is the heaviest layer, and the most silent.

Said out loud, and shared, the same load gets lighter to carry.

You may brace for something further off too. Will your sibling get better? Who will look after them when your parents grow old? Will it quietly land on you? It is okay to think about this honestly. With treatment, these experiences can often settle well, and the future is not written yet. Pretending the worry away does not make it lighter. It just leaves you carrying it alone and in the dark.

IN YOUR CORNER

A load carried in silence gets heavier. Saying it out loud, even to one safe person, takes some of the weight off your chest. You do not have to say it perfectly. You just have to stop carrying it completely alone.

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YOUR FEELINGS COUNT TOO

Fear, embarrassment, and love, all at once

IN SHORT

You may feel scared of the illness, embarrassed in front of others, guilty for feeling embarrassed, and still love your sibling deeply. None of this makes you a bad sibling. It makes you a person in a hard situation.

Fear is common. Fear of the next bad patch. Fear of a voice you cannot hear, or a belief you cannot reach. Sometimes, fear of your sibling when they are very unwell and not themselves. That fear is understandable, and it is worth telling an adult about, not hiding.

Embarrassment can come too. You may know the worry "log kya kahenge" well, and your family may decide to keep it all quiet. In one Indian study, almost half of family carers felt uneasy telling others. Feeling embarrassed does not mean you love your sibling less. Guilt for feeling embarrassed is part of the same load.

All at once

love and fear can share one heart

You can love your sibling and be frightened of the illness in the same moment. Both are allowed, and neither cancels the other.

There can be grief too. Grief for the brother or sister you used to have: the jokes, the fights over the TV, the plans you shared. Grief like this is allowed, even while your sibling is still here and still loved. Pushing these feelings down does not shrink them. They leak out as short temper, or a tiredness you cannot explain.

Secrets get heavy. You do not have to tell everyone, but it helps to tell someone. Pick one friend who has been kind and kept things private before. You can keep it simple: "My brother is unwell, and things at home are hard. I do not want to say much, but I wanted you to know." It is your story, and your sibling's too, so share only what feels fair to you both.



Meera, telling one friend the real story.

After months of making excuses, Meera told her friend Sana on the walk home from tuition. She did not explain everything. She said Arjun was unwell, that home was hard, and that she was tired. Sana did not ask a hundred questions. She walked a little slower. The next week she asked, "How is home?" It was the first time in months that Meera felt less alone.

If someone reacts badly, that tells you about them, not about your family. You can try someone else, or talk to a counsellor.

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BEING THERE WITHOUT LOSING YOURSELF

A sibling, not a nurse

IN SHORT

You are the sibling, not the doctor, the nurse or the one always on watch. You can care deeply and still not be the one holding everything together.

You are the sibling. You are not the doctor, the nurse, or the person who must watch them every hour. Leave medicines, appointments and safety plans to your parents and the doctor. You can care deeply and still hand those jobs back. Your sibling needs you as a brother or sister, not as one more person treating them.

What helps is often small and ordinary. Sit with them over chai. Watch a cricket match together. Talk about normal things, not only the illness. If they share a belief you do not hold, you do not need to argue or agree. You can say, "That sounds really scary," and stay with the feeling. Families can also learn together how to respond. Guidelines recommend family sessions with the care team for families who live with someone going through this. These sessions are a way to help the whole family cope.

Care, do not carry it all.

You can love your sibling without holding every part of the illness yourself.

Do not argue the belief.

A belief that feels this real rarely shifts with argument. Listen to the feeling instead.

Keep the ordinary.

Jokes, chai, a shared show. Being their sibling is something only you can give.

Share the weight.

Bring in your parents and the doctor. Support works best when it is spread.

You did not cause your sibling's illness, and you cannot cure it. But you can help, by being steady and kind, and by looking after yourself too. Boundaries are not cruelty. Saying no to some things, or stepping back when you are drained, is what lets you keep showing up for years. You are allowed your own life: friends, studies, work, rest and your own plans.

6

GETTING HELP, FOR THEM AND FOR YOU

When things feel unsafe, and help for you

IN SHORT

Some signs mean your sibling needs a doctor soon, and some mean they need help today. You do not have to handle either alone. Help is also for you, not only for your sibling.

Tell your parents or another adult if things seem to be getting worse. Watch for stronger voices or fears, or much more drinking or drug use. Nights without sleep, or suddenly stopping medicine, can also bring symptoms back. Telling early lets the adults and the doctor act sooner. Telling is not betrayal. It is care.

Some signs need help the same day. Your sibling talks about not wanting to be alive, or about hurting themselves. Or they say voices are telling them to hurt someone. If you are worried, it is okay to ask directly: "Are you thinking of hurting yourself?" Asking does not put the idea in their head. Do not leave them alone. Reduce easy access to anything they could use to hurt themselves. Get an adult and a doctor involved the same day. If anyone at home feels in danger, move to a safe place first and call 112.

NUMBERS TO KEEP

In India, **Tele-MANAS on 14416** is a free government mental-health helpline. It is open 24 hours a day, in 20 Indian languages. You can call about your own worries too, not only your sibling's. In an emergency, call 112 or go to the nearest hospital.

Help is also for you. A school or college counsellor, a trusted teacher, an aunt or cousin who listens, or a counsellor of your own can all help. Guidelines ask care teams to give families information and support of their own. Family sessions may include other family members, so you can ask to join. You can ask the doctor your own questions too. A sibling who is steady and supported can keep showing up for the brother or sister they love.



You are allowed to be looked after too, not only to look after.

WHERE THIS COMES FROM

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FURTHER READING

- NICE: Psychosis and schizophrenia in adults, information for the public
- Tele-MANAS: National Tele Mental Health Programme, India (call 14416)

This guide helps you recognise and understand. It is not a diagnosis. For that, see a professional.

- Feeling like it is all too much? **Read the crisis card.** Help is one page away.
- Tele-MANAS, the free national helpline: **14416**. Any time, day or night. From the Government of India.