

# April

Hello, my name is April and I am 13 years old and in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. I attend a private church school in central Nebraska. I got my first IEP in kindergarten and it was for speech. In the second grade I also found out I had a learning disability called dyslexia. This means I sometimes turn my letters backwards. After I graduate I want to do something that helps animals or people. Maybe I will become an artist or vet tech.



I was chosen today to come and speak to you not because of the problems I have had in school, but to give you a sibling's perspective. I don't have a mental health diagnosis, but my other siblings do. I came here today to help you understand that how you help or treat my brother or sister not only affects them, but my entire family.

By the time I started going to school, my brother was all ready having problems. He would give his teachers and principal lots of headaches. They always seemed to be mad at him for something he did or something he didn't get done. My sister had her share of troubles in school but not as bad as my brother. So, when I got to school everybody figured I would have problems too. I even had to take tests at school because the teachers thought that I was too quiet because my brother was hurting me at home and I was afraid to talk about it. The school wanted my parents to send him away because he was bad. The tests showed that I was just shy. That is still very true today, I don't like to talk to people I don't know.

I have a lot of bad memories about my brother and sister in school. I saw lots of people being mean to them. I saw both of them cry a lot. I saw teachers and the principal yell at my brother and get mad at him a lot. It always seemed the kids who picked on him or hurt him never got punished. But he was in trouble all the time. I remember him coming home sometimes with blood on his shirt, scratches and bruises, and scared for his life because of what kids were doing to him. But instead of standing up for himself at school, he just bottled all that anger and took it out on all of us at home.

I remember telling mom about seeing him crying in the principal's office. I didn't know what he had done this time, but I knew we were going to have a bad night at home. He usually would come home and throw stuff, break things, hit me, mom, or my sister. The scariest thing was that most of the time he would just hurt himself by pounding his head or making himself bleed. This could go on for hours. Sometimes this made me angry, but most of the time I just wanted to help him not be in so much pain.

Because I go to a small school my sister and I were in the same class for two years. It would make me so sad to see how teachers would treat her. She isn't very neat (I know this because we share the same room!) her handwriting is messy, she's not a

good speller or reader to say the least she isn't very organized either. I saw teachers be mean to her about this, they would compare her sloppy handwriting to the "neat kids" in front of the class. One time the teacher got angry because he said she lost her Junior Scholastic paper, she never got one I know because she was absent that day. Our school didn't have enough science books for the entire class so we had to share. The teacher got mad at her when she didn't get assignments done and accused her of being lazy. It was the other kids who were being lazy because they didn't have their assignments done and wouldn't let her have a book to use.

My sister would come home and not talk to me anymore. She didn't want to do any fun stuff anymore with me. When she started cutting herself to make herself feel better she didn't tell me about it. She couldn't even let me know how bad she was feeling. She hid it from my entire family.

My brother and sister do have problems. Sometimes I wish they didn't. It is hard at home sometimes, because I see my mom exhausted trying to help them calm down. She tries to help them be successful. She always takes the extra time to help them out with their homework or to help them understand stuff. It stinks sometimes, because she doesn't have the time to help me as much as I would like. But she does try to do special things with me and give me extra attention when she can.

I understand how my brother and sister can make teachers frustrated. They do it to me all the time. But getting angry doesn't help them. It makes them worse. We don't come from a bad family either. I wish teachers would stop saying this. They assume I have bad parents because of the way my siblings act. Instead they should do what my parents do, take the time to listen to them, REALLY LISTEN to them and find out what the problem is. Then take the time to help them sort it out and how to make it better. I wish teachers would talk with my parents more and treat them better. My parents really know how to help all of us do better. I guess they are kind of experts in dealing with us because they are around us the most.

Even though my brother and sister drive me crazy sometimes, I still love them and wouldn't want them to go away. There so many more good days than bad days with them. We have lots of fun times. When teachers or my friends come up to me and say that I would be better off if they weren't around it makes me so sad. I LOVE my family, especially my brother and sister.

My advice is to take the time to know kids like my brother and sister. Get to know their parents and other family members too. Don't always assume the worst. When they have a bad day at school, it comes home and affects other people in the family. There are times I have trouble getting my homework done, because my brother or sister have had a bad night at home. Talk to me about this, and give me some extra time to finish my assignments if necessary.

When I joined YES\* as a sibling I met other kids who had problems like them. What I learned was that they were more like me than I thought. All of the YES kids have talents, whether it's drawing, speaking, cooking, sports or whatever. We all have stuff we're good at and stuff we're bad at. We just focus on the good stuff and not so much on the bad. At YES, we talk out our problems and figure out how to fix them in good ways. We never want to hurt other people or treat them badly. We have lots of fun being together. If teachers would help all students understand this, not just kids like my brother or sister, everyone would be happier.

My brother and sister have taught me so much about life that I thank God for giving me them because they are special. We could all learn from them. We need to remember that we are all God's children and we are all special, he put on this earth for a reason. We need to understand that they were put on this earth to teach us about life and we all should feel lucky to have known them.

April, Age 13

February, 2005

Nebraska

---

\* Y.E.S. (Youth Encouraging Support) is a program for youth with emotional, mental and/or behavioral challenges sponsored by Families CARE a family organization in central Nebraska.