

# My brother or sister died, But I'm still here.

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Are these words that you've thought or said? On top of all the grief reactions you've been experiencing: sadness, confusion, anger, shock, guilt plus missing your sibling, you have a number of issues unique to sibling grief. Let's look at some.

[Note: Instead of saying "brother or sister" or "him or her," I'm using "brother" and "him," to refer to both genders.]

## **I'm Still Here**

Among all the grief reactions that you see in your parents, the big one, of course, is this: They miss your brother or sister. They miss him just being around. They look at you and perhaps see him in you. Just looking at your face may be one of the thousand reminders that he is never, ever coming back. You may hear his name spoken often or by contrast, your parents may have found it too hard right now to name or even talk about him. At any rate, here you are walking in and out of the house often feeling invisible. As the title states, sometimes you may want to grab your parents' attention, wave your arms in front of their face, and blurt out, "Hey, it's me. I'm still here."

## **Not Wanting to Be the Kid Whose Sibling Died**

Within a day or two of your brother's death the entire school knows about it. Like most people, kids in school don't know how to deal with death. You have to deal with walking down the hall wishing not to be looked at or talked about. When you see people look at you, whisper, or even look away, are they talking about you?

## **Feeling Helpless as I Watch My Mom and Dad Grieve**

As you've discovered in life: There are some things over which you have no control—and this is one of them. If you have other siblings, you have found that there is nothing you can say and nothing you can do to ease their grief. The same goes for your parents. This may be the first time you saw your mom or dad cry. There you are, standing there, wanting to do something—anything to stop the tears; and you can't. If someone were to hurt your parents, you would have jumped to their defense and found a way to stop it. However, this is different. You might find yourself having resentment or even anger toward your brother for somehow having brought these changes to you and your family members. You know it wasn't his "fault"; but all you know for sure is that one day your family was sort of OK and, at the moment your brother died, they're not. While you hope that someday things will be better, at the moment, it is hard to imagine.

## Pretending to Be OK When I'm Not

Depending upon your family, you may find at times that your parents are in your face, hovering over you, asking where you plan to go, when you'll be home, and why you took so long to return their text? You also may get a lot of: "How are you feeling? Are you OK? Let me know if you need something." On the other hand, as I mentioned earlier, at times you may feel invisible to your parents. They walk by you in a daze. Or they call you by your brother's name. Or they forget important events and dates such as school or sporting events, signing a form, or making your lunch. If Mom or Dad apologizes, you might say what many siblings say, "Not a big deal." You have soon realized that it's your job to "be fine." You don't wish to make your parents' grief any worse, so you suck it in, you emotionally insulate, you fake it. Why? Because your parents are already hurting so bad, the last thing they need is to worry about you. However, you may come to realize that putting up too brave a front can backfire. Parents worry. Especially now when the worst that could happen has happened—the death of a child. And there you are acting "OK" and they worry. They worry that you are not "grieving right." (I've written an article on this: [Something's Wrong with My Surviving Child—He \(or She\) is Not Grieving Right.](#)) You have been placed into a Catch-22: If you show little or no grief, they worry: "He's stuffing his grief." If you show a lot of grief: "He can't handle this--needs therapy." I've never had a parent come up to me and say, "You know, my surviving child is grieving just right."

## Dealing with a Perfect Sibling

When someone dies, they make no more mistakes. They are often placed in a type of "saintly" status. Their earthly flaws are never brought up, their positive attributes accentuated. You know this better than most anyone that your sibling wasn't perfect. Yet, you hear stories about how great he was. How do you live up to that? You may have found yourself living in the shadow of your deceased sibling, leading to feelings of resentment. Resentment for not only dying and leaving you to deal with your parents and you're angry for having to live up to an impossible model.

## The Future

Through no fault of your own, you've been thrust into a world you never imagined. While attempting to deal with your own grief, you've watched your parents change before your eyes. In an attempt to "protect" them you've hidden your true reactions. In the eyes of your peers, you're now "the kid whose brother died." What can you do now? Here are suggestions that I've heard from siblings on what helped them:

By reading articles such as this one, you've become a little more aware that you share issues with many bereaved siblings. You are clearly not the only sibling who has had to deal with these tough problems. There are other helpful articles out there. A great place to find them is here: [Children do mourn, but they will typically show their grief differently than adults. These ways reflect the level at which your child is presently able to come to terms with the death. Their understanding will change as they develop through the years. We also want to address again the important question of whether to tell your children the truth about the circumstances of the death. In an attempt to protect children, well-meaning adults may consider hiding the fact that the death was a suicide or the method by which it was carried out.](#)

[But even if children do not know the facts of a situation, they are usually keenly aware of the emotional responses of the adults around them. They know something very upsetting has happened, and without knowing the facts, they tend to construct their own \(often incorrect\) explanation, sometimes attributing the death to something they did or did not do.](#) Try to always tell the truth. Seek guidance as needed.