

## **HOW YOUR OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS MAY BE AFFECTED BY YOUR CHILD'S ILLNESS**

There may also be emotional effects on your other family members over time. The severe illness of a child changes your family and has an emotional impact. You may become a different parent. Your relationship with your partner and your children may change. Your expectations for each of your children may change somewhat. You may give up some hopes and develop other hopes. You may find your own attitude toward health and your family somewhat changed by the experience of your child having been so ill. You may find that your priorities change. You may take on new causes and encourage others to work with you for particular goals that may or may not relate to your child's experience.

We have talked already about some of the immediate effects on brothers and sisters. Longer-term effects on brothers and sisters vary considerably and depend on many of the same factors that make predictions for the survivors themselves so difficult. Relevant factors for brothers and sisters include their personal characteristics, temperaments, their place and role in the family, environmental factors including family functioning, and how the survivor does, amongst many others.<sup>4</sup> Survivors may feel more the positive impact their illness had than their brothers and sisters do. Their brothers and sisters may have felt more of the negative effects on the family (less parental attention, more disruption, more worries) and fewer of the special benefits.

There can be a myriad of ways in which serious illness affects the family. Maybe it caused a financial impact that was hard to recover from and led to sacrifices among family members. Maybe it brought out irreconcilable differences within the family. Maybe it gave a new direction and purpose to the family. Maybe it affected a brother or sister's worldview or even influenced the choices he or she made about a future career. Maybe it increased the empathy that family members felt for others with health problems.

Your family's story will be a unique one. There may be some things you have lost or not been able to do, some priorities that have shifted. There may be other things you have learned or ways that you have grown as a family. Whatever the changes are, it is very likely that your family's story will be changed by your family experience of your child's illness.

## **A FINAL WORD ON EMOTIONAL EFFECTS**

There is enormous variability in positive and negative emotional effects shown by survivors of childhood illnesses, both individually and over time, which is likely influenced by who they are and what is currently happening in their lives, some of which may be related to effects of their treatment and some of which is likely not to be. Surviving their illness may have given some survivors unique strengths and resilience. For others, it may have supported prior negative expectations about the unfairness of life (providing ammunition to construct a negative view of the world and the future). For some, there will be serious late physical effects; for others, no physical late effects.

Your role will change in the coming years, but it will be no less important. For you, overseeing your child's followup until she can take over, tolerating any ups and downs, empathizing with setbacks if they happen, remaining positive with your child, cultivating resilience in yourself and your child, seeking expert help if you or your child needs it, encouraging independence in your child, and, if possible, gradually helping your child take on responsibility for his own health care followup (the subject of chapter 20) are just some of your vital and challenging tasks.