

 **TABLE 4.3** Some Negative Emotional Responses of Children Toward Siblings With a Disability

| Emotion                 | Response  |
|-------------------------|---|
| Resentment              | Perhaps the most common reaction experienced by typical siblings is resentment. It is a natural by-product of being angry about having a brother or sister with a disability. Resentment may develop because the child with special needs may require a disproportionate amount of the parents' attention. This sibling may also prohibit the family from participating in certain experiences or excursions. Special treatments and/or therapy may contribute to family financial hardship. Older siblings may resent having to babysit, or having social constraints placed upon them by their younger brother or sister who is disabled. |
| Jealousy                | Resentment can easily develop into jealousy, especially if the typical sibling perceives that he or she has lost "favor" with the parents. The brother or sister with a disability may become a rival or competitor for the parents' attention and affection. Often the typical sibling will engage in behaviors designed to secure parental attention, such as having academic or behavioral problems in school, telling lies, or exhibiting unusual mischievousness.  |
| Hostility               | From feelings of jealousy often comes hostility, which is a perfectly natural reaction. Unlike objective adults, children are subjective and consider events in terms of how they are personally affected. They may view their brother or sister with special needs, rather than the disability, as the source of all their problems. Therefore, feelings of hostility are usually aimed toward their sibling. These feelings may manifest themselves in physical aggression or verbal harassment and ridicule. In some instances, hostility is directed toward the parents through acts of disobedience or impertinence.                   |
| Guilt                   | Siblings without disabilities frequently evidence feelings of guilt; however, these reactions differ from the parents'. Their guilt may stem from the negative feelings they have about their brother or sister, or it may be a consequence of having mistreated their sibling. Furthermore, when viewing their sibling who has an impairment, some children experience guilt because of their own good fortune to be thought of as typical.  |
| Grief                   | Siblings frequently grieve for their brother or sister who is disabled. Their grief is often a reflection of their parents' sorrow. They grieve not for what they have lost, but for what will possibly be denied to their sibling.   |
| Fear                    | Typical siblings may also experience fear. They may be fearful of acquiring a disability or of their own future children being disabled. A further worry is that someday they may have to assume total responsibility for the care of their sibling.  |
| Shame and embarrassment | Shame and embarrassment are common emotional responses of typical siblings. A child may be ashamed of his or her brother or sister who is intellectually disabled, embarrassed to have friends visit, or embarrassed to be seen in public with his or her sibling.  |
| Rejection               | In some families, siblings who are typical may reject their brother or sister with a disability. They may reject the reality of the impairment. More commonly, however, rejection is shown by withholding affection or ignoring the sibling's existence.  |

SOURCE: Adapted from R. Gargiulo, *Working With Parents of Exceptional Children: A Guide for Professionals* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1985), pp. 51–52.