



The Normal One: Life with a Difficult or Damaged Sibling

Jeanne Safer

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What is it like to grow up with a sibling who is difficult or damaged?

Few bonds in our lives are as psychologically and emotionally significant as the ones we share with our sisters and brothers, although little has been written about this formative relationship. In this first-of-its-kind book, psychotherapist Jeanne Safer takes us into the hidden world of problem siblings and explores the far-reaching effects on the lives of those who are considered the “normal ones.”

Drawing on more than sixty interviews with normal, or intact, siblings, Safer explores the daunting challenges they face, and probes the complex feelings that can strain families and damage lives. A “normal” sibling herself, Safer chronicles her own life-shaping experiences with her troubled brother. She examines the double-edged reality of normal ones: how they both compensate for their siblings’ abnormality and feel guilty for their own health and success. With both wisdom and empathy, she delineates the “Caliban Syndrome,” a set of personality traits characteristic of higher-functioning siblings: premature maturity, compulsion to achieve, survivor guilt, and fear of contagion.

Essential reading for normal ones and those who love them, this landmark work offers readers insight, compassion, and tools to help resolve childhood pain. It is a profound and eye-opening examination of a subject that has too long been shrouded in darkness.

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