

Enhancing Individuality in Multiples

From birth onwards, all children need to develop a sense of self. Their relationships with their parents, care givers, siblings and wider family help them to form this.

The process is more complex for multiples, but it's just as important for each child to develop a sense of self and individual worth.

When children develop a secure relationship with others they become emotionally strong, self-assured and able to deal with challenges. This creates an important foundation for their learning and development.

Giving children messages of respect, love, approval and encouragement enables them to develop a

positive sense of who they are and a feeling that they have an important contribution to make.

With twins and higher multiples, helping individuality develop has real bonuses even in the early years. It can enhance language and social skills, and reduce difficult behaviour.

Positive messages about themselves, their families, backgrounds, cultures, beliefs and languages helps children develop pride in who they are.

In this way, they learn confidence to voice their views, make choices, and help shape their learning, so that they can become strong, confident and independent adults.

WHY DO MULTIPLE BIRTH CHILDREN NEED TO DEVELOP THEIR OWN INDIVIDUALITY?

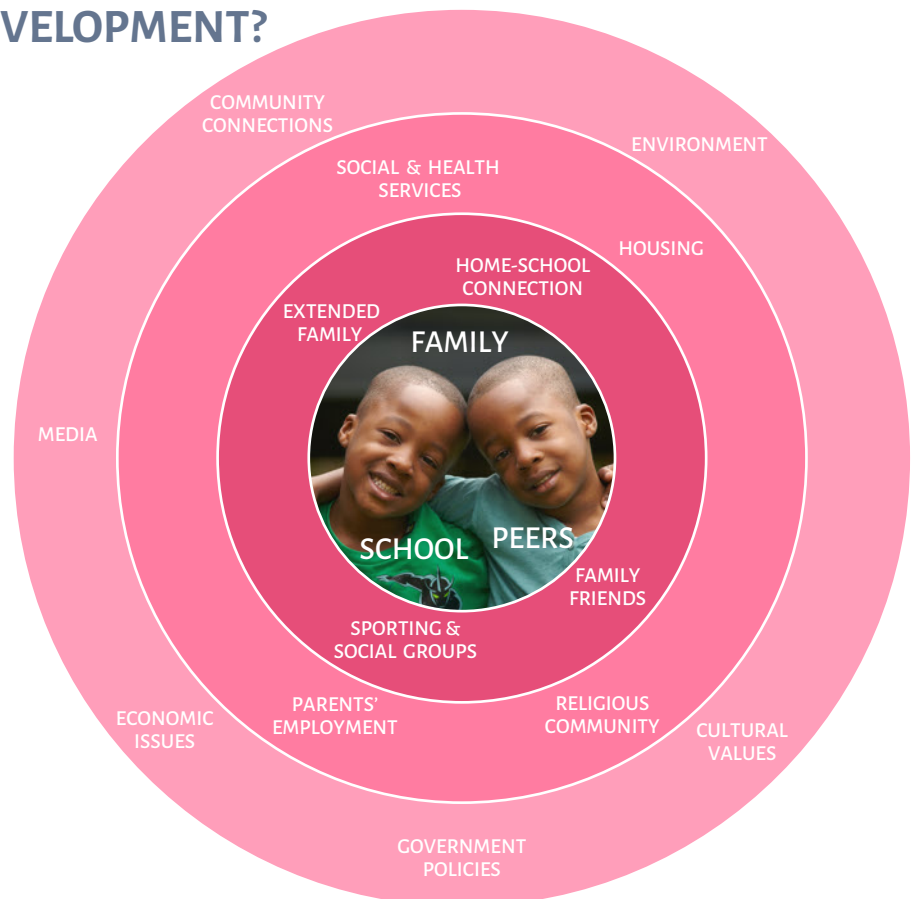
Over the last thirty years there has been an increase in research into this area and we know that in order to help multiples develop their full potential they need to be encouraged to express their own individual needs.

To achieve this it is important that those who are caring for them ensure the multiples are each treated as individuals by themselves and by those around them.

Right from the beginning, parents and carers can help each multiple birth child to develop their own sense of themselves as individuals.

In the early days this can be done by giving them non rhyming names, by dressing them differently or in different coloured outfits and by using their individual names rather than collectively calling them "the twins", "the triplets", "the quads" etc. ▶▶▶

WHAT INFLUENCES A CHILD'S INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT?



Children are not aware of being separate individuals until between 18 months to three years of age. However, starting small and early can get you (and others) into good habits for later life. If they are used to always being together or always wearing the same clothes, then the older they get the more distressed they may become if you try to make changes.

However this does not mean denying their special relationship as one of a multiple. Rather it allows them to see themselves as individuals who have the bonus of being part of a multiple unit rather than defining themselves solely as a twin or triplet. This in turn helps them grow up to become independent adults able to fulfil their own potential and make their own choices.



“ Twins need to be addressed as individual children who will grow up to be individual adults. If you relate to them as ‘twins’ rather than as separate beings, they will relate to each other and the world as ‘twins’ because that will be the reality they’ll know. Thinking of your children as distinct individuals from the moment you are told you’re pregnant with twins will ensure that they think of themselves as unique.

Dr Joan Friedman - Twin Individuality Expert

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF SUPPORTING EACH CHILD’S INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT?

- ✓ **Children build their social skills**
- ✓ **Language skills improve**
- ✓ **Behaviour is less competitive and so they are less likely to fight**
- ✓ **Parenting is more satisfying because you can relate to each child as an individual**
- ✓ **Children cope with separation better as they go through schooling and into young adulthood**
- ✓ **Their schoolwork and social development at school will be easier**
- ✓ **Multiple birth teenagers treated as individuals have more confidence: transition to adult life is less difficult**
- ✓ **Multiple birth adults are independent with a strong sense of self, able to form relationships with others**

BARRIERS TO ENHANCING INDIVIDUALITY

- Time / tiredness - finding opportunities to play, read or chat with each child individually can be challenging.
- Finances - unlike families of different aged siblings, multiples may have to share more as a consequence of being the same age.
- Parents often value their status as parents of multiples and can have a great deal invested in their children being seen as 'twins' or 'triplets' rather than individuals.
- Children's preferences and relationships - Sometimes the children may want to dress the same or do the same activity. The key is to offer choice.
- Other people's attitudes - There tends to be a great interest in multiples within society so the 'twinship' or 'tripletship' is the thing noted and commented on rather than any individual characteristic as with a singleton child.
- Monozygotic (identical) multiples often share more physical and psychological traits and often have to cope with others perceptions and expectations of them to be the same.
- Families, friends and professionals can all find it easier to refer to "the twins" or "the triplets" rather than make the effort required telling them apart and speaking to them individually. Even non identical twins experience this.
- It can be difficult especially for an identical twin or triplet to recognise themselves as different from their sibling(s). Separation from each other can be as difficult as separation from their mother.
- Close identification with a sibling can lead to behaviours that prevent them being seen as individuals e.g. multiples of different academic abilities may hold themselves back rather than outshine their sibling(s).
- Multiples may be compared more than other siblings and can be labelled as 'the good one', 'the mischievous one', 'the clever one' etc. which can leave them stuck in that role and unable to act in any other way.

ENCOURAGING YOUR MULTIPLES TO MAKE CHOICES AND EXPRESS THEIR INDIVIDUALITY

All children are treated the same at some point in their lives and parents of multiples need not feel they are failing their children when they treat them in a similar way. Provided they allow opportunities for their children to express both their individuality and enjoy their multiple relationships, then their children will develop as individuals. The key here is offering opportunity. For example toddlers might choose which snack to eat, what shirt to wear or what story to read. Pre-schoolers can be offered choices over games to play. If you notice one trying to influence the other, use this as an opportunity to discuss how it's ok to choose something the same sometimes but to choose a different option at other times.

Encourage school age children to make choices of different after-school activities,

sports and different play dates with friends. Some parents find it helpful to say to other parents that it is OK to have



the twins or triplets back for tea on different days. There is a perception amongst other parents that twins or triplets have to do everything together

and that can lead to a reduction in play dates offered to multiples families. If one child is invited on a play date or to a party, look at this as an opportunity to spend quality time with the child who is not going.

Teenagers and young adults will need to make important choices about what GCSEs to take, part time jobs, Sixth Form or College, University, relationships with boyfriends and girlfriends, travel, careers and marriage. If you have enhanced their individuality from an early age they will find it easier to make these important life choices and decisions for themselves regardless of what path their multiple has decided to take. An important life skill is to learn to make good choices and be content with the consequences of your choices.

TOP TIPS FOR ENCOURAGING MULTIPLE CHILDREN'S INDIVIDUALITY TO BE ENHANCED

Giving each child individual time and attention is greatly beneficial and worth the extra time invested. This can be done in a variety of ways and may require the help of family or friends. Many parents with multiples include in their routine a time once a week when one parent takes out one

child and the other/s stay at home with the other parent, a family member or friend. In this way each child has a regular opportunity for one to one time. But even if you don't have family or friends to help, there are many positive ways of enhancing individuality:

DO...

- ✓ Spend one to one time simply by going into a separate room and reading a story together or even in the same room playing a game with just one child. A rota or timer can help the other child(ren) wait for their turn. Five minutes regularly offered is more effective than an hour done occasionally.
- ✓ Try and talk to each child separately about their day, perhaps as part of the bedtime routine, so each one knows they will have your full attention on at least one occasion everyday.
- ✓ You could have a special story, nursery rhyme, joke or a physical game for each of your children which is special to the two of you.
- ✓ On their birthday, sing happy birthday to each child individually.
- ✓ Ensure that your children are not expected to share when other children get their own.
- ✓ Address each child by name and give each one eye contact when talking to them.
- ✓ Be consistent when managing each child's behaviour.



- ✓ Encourage the development of individual interests but try not to insist on it. Enhancing individuality can mean allowing a multiple child to do the same as his or her sibling.
- ✓ Life is not always fair or equal so teach your children this by letting one go first one day and the other go first the next day. Or for example if only one has grown out of their shoes, just buy them new shoes and their multiple sibling can have new shoes when their feet have grown. It doesn't have to be at the same time.
- ✓ Allow children to have individual goals which are realistic for them and their level of abilities.
- ✓ Let them know that whether they make the same or a different decision from their co-multiple is equally acceptable and they are free to express their own wishes. It's ok to like different things but also to like the same things.
- ✓ Give the children and other people visual clues to identify their uniqueness. This may be dressing them differently, having different hair styles or having the same outfits but in different colours.
- ✓ Give each child a space which they can call their own and allow them to keep personal things that are not shared e.g. in their own cardboard box. Many of their toys will be shared with co-multiple and siblings, but it's also important for them to have some special belongings of their own.
- ✓ Celebrate an individual's achievements even if the other one/ones feel jealous and hurt.
- ✓ Encourage multiples to praise one another for their achievements.
- ✓ Take individual photos of each child alone and of them individually with their parents. Record which multiple it is at the time so in future years you will remember who it is.
- ✓ Start early. If they are used to always being together or always wearing the same then the older they get the more distressed they will become if you make changes.
- ✓ As the children get older talk to them about the differences and value those differences with them.

TRY NOT TO...

- ✗ Do not compare your multiples to each other. Each is on their own unique life path. Compare them to their peers rather than to each other.
- ✗ Do not rely on your twins and multiples to be each other's constant companion or caretaker.

WHAT SUPPORT DOES TAMBA OFFER?

Tamba aims to provide high quality information and mutual support networks for families of twins, triplets and more, highlighting their unique needs to all involved in their care.

We have Twinline, a confidential helpline for parent to parent support (Call: 0800138 0509 between 10am-1pm and 7pm-10pm daily) or email AskTwinline@tamba.org.uk.

Tamba's Multiple Behaviour Tips and Techniques for Effective Parenting webinar is for parents and carers of multiples aged one to eight years old. This two-part webinar will enable parents / carers to reconsider their parenting styles, how they view their

multiples' behaviour and how best to deal with this behaviour in a positive way and to enhance their multiples individuality. For more information click here: www.tamba.org.uk/courses

We also have a number of parent support groups for one parent, special needs and specialist support to parents through Honorary Consultants.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Emotionally Healthy Twins: A New Philosophy for Parenting Two Unique Children - Dr. Joan A Friedman, 2008.

The Same but Different: How Twins Can Live, Love and Learn to be Individuals - Dr Joan A Friedman, 2014.

Twins, Triplets and More - Their Nature, Development and Care - Elizabeth Bryan, Penguin, 1992.

Twins and Multiple Births - The Essential Parenting Guide from Pregnancy to Adulthood - Dr Carol Cooper, Vermillion, 2013.

Twins and the Family - The Essential Guide to Bringing up Twins - Audrey Sandbank, Tamba, 2003.

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