

RESULTS OF A SURVEY OF ADULT TWINS
REGARDING THEIR EXPERIENCES AS A TWIN AT
PRIMARY SCHOOL

2015

Report prepared for TAMBA by Dr Lynn Cherkas

INTRODUCTION

2,045 twins aged 16 - 50 years on the TwinsUK register (www.twinsuk.ac.uk) were sent an email asking them to participate in a survey about their experiences as a twin at primary school. This survey was conducted using an online questionnaire with the help of the Department of Twin Research & Genetic Epidemiology (DTR), Kings College, London.

672 twins responded, a response rate of 33%, which is somewhat lower than for most DTR surveys, possibly because of the time when the questionnaire was sent (Summer - July).

Nine in ten respondents (90%) were female (Q1) and the same proportion of respondents (89%) had a female twin (Q2).

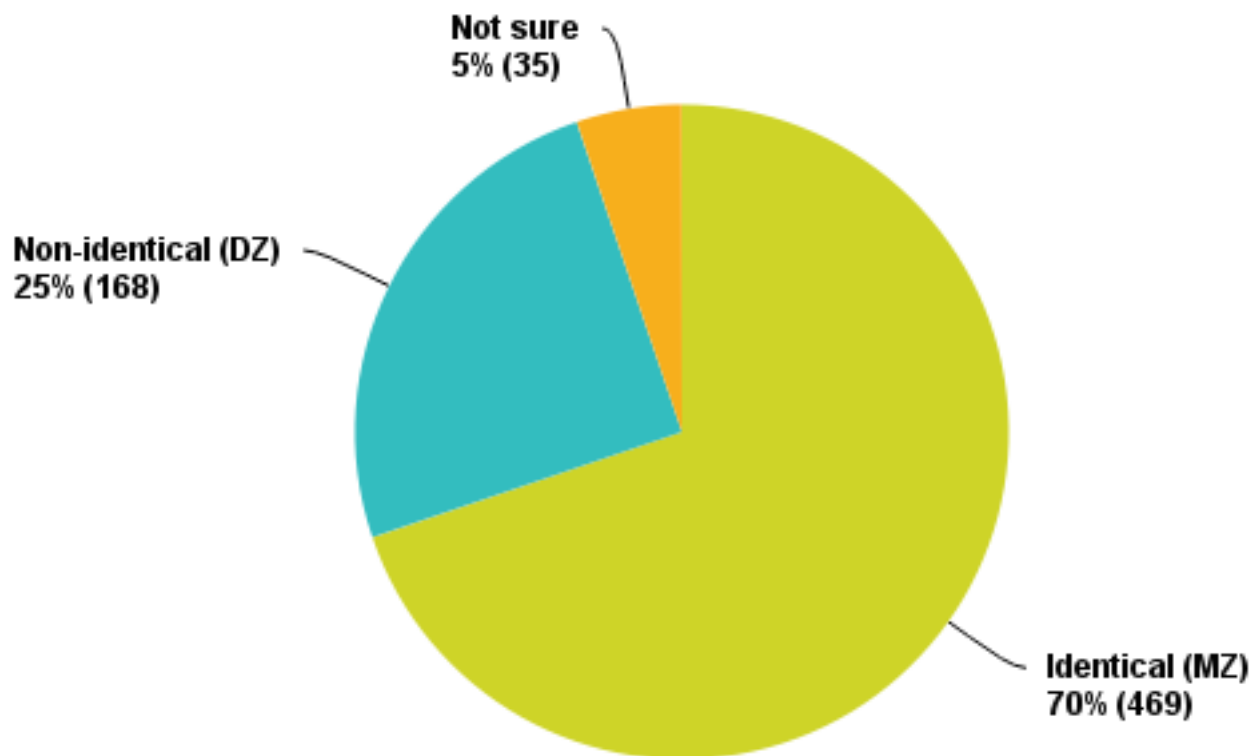
This preponderance of female-female twin pairs reflects the profile of twins on the TwinsUK register which was originally set up to look at diseases of ageing in females and is therefore not representative of the twin population in terms of gender. However, whilst more males are now being recruited, they are also less likely to respond to questionnaires.

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Q3. Are you an identical (MZ) or non-identical (DZ) twin?

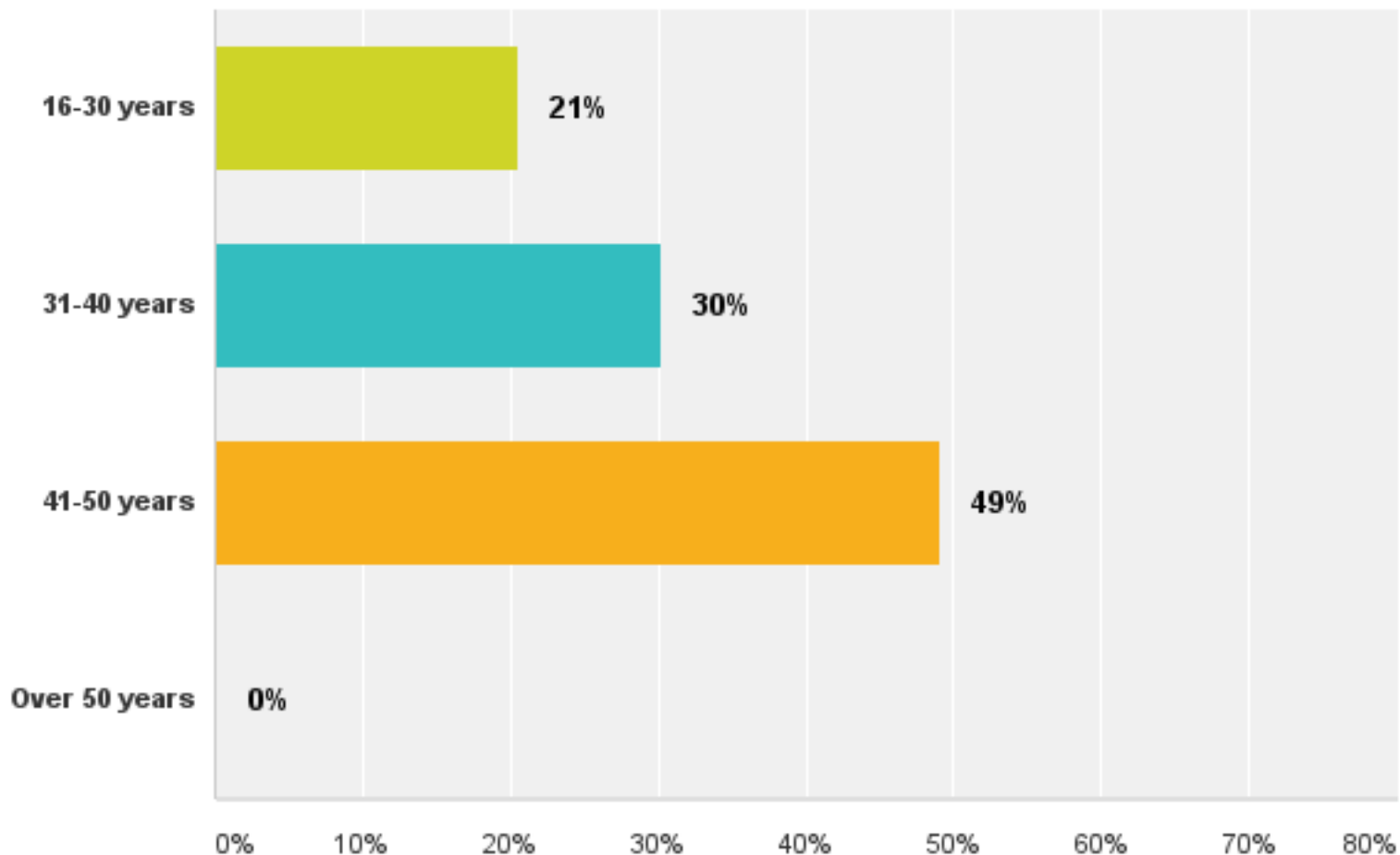
(Base: All respondents; n=672)



Although only one third (33%) of twins in the UK are identical (MZ), the proportion of identical twins responding to this survey (70%) is representative of the proportion of identical twins on the TwinsUK register aged under 50 who were sent this questionnaire.

Q4. How old are you?

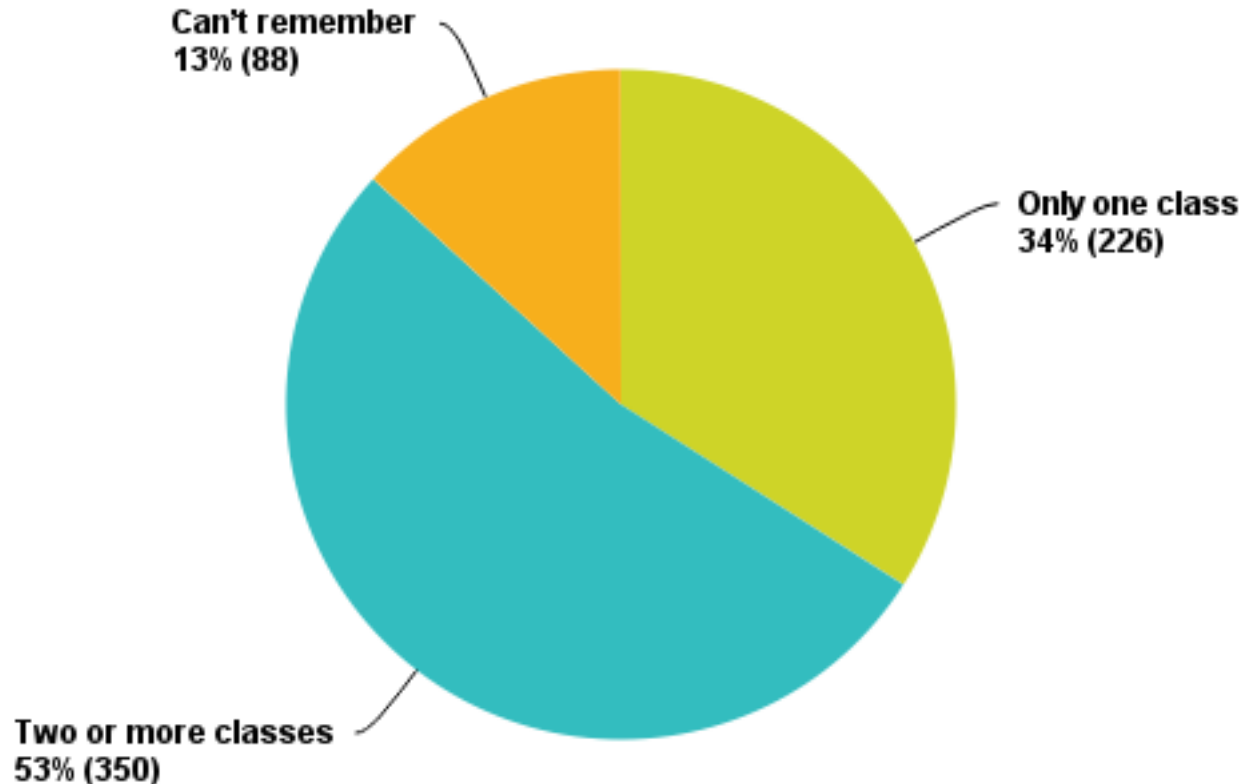
(Base: All respondents; n=672)



Half the respondents (51%) were aged between 16-40 years and half (49%) were aged between 41-50 years.

Q5 & Q6. When you and your twin started primary school, how many classes were there in the year?

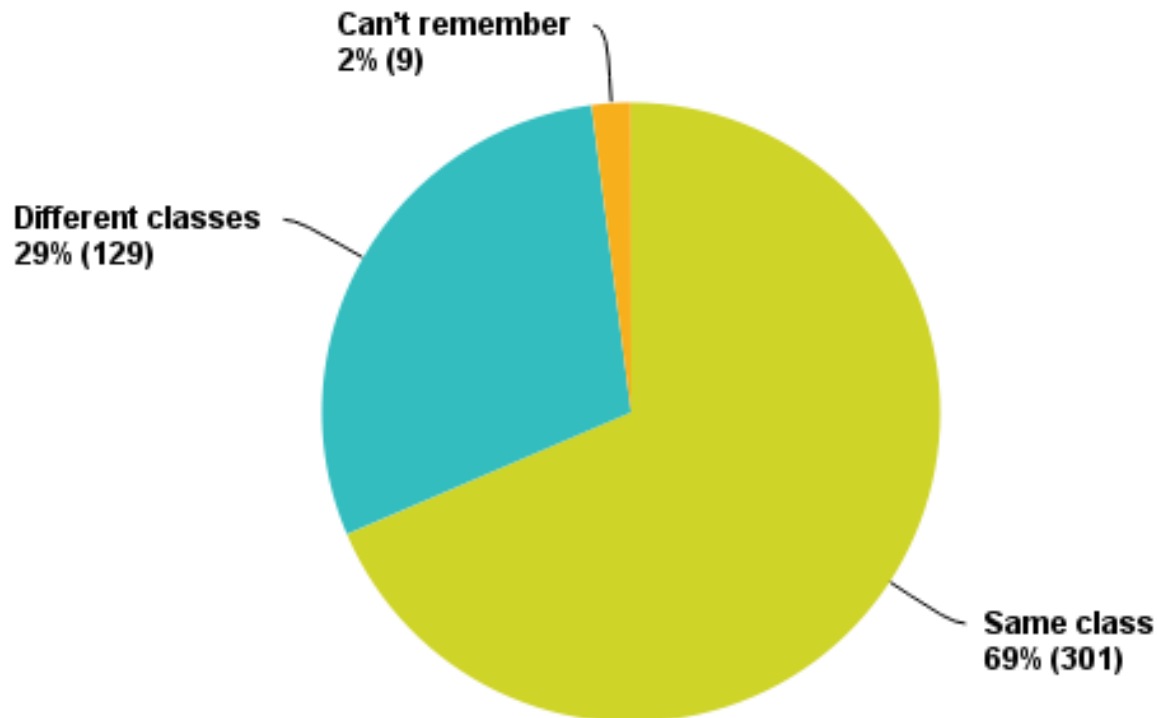
(Base: Q5=All respondents at same primary school; n=664)



One in three respondents (34%) recalled there being only one class at their primary school, whilst half (53%) recalled there being at least two classes.

Q7. On starting school, were you and your twin put together in the same class or were you separated into different classes?

(Base: Q6 = 2+classes or can't remember, n=439)

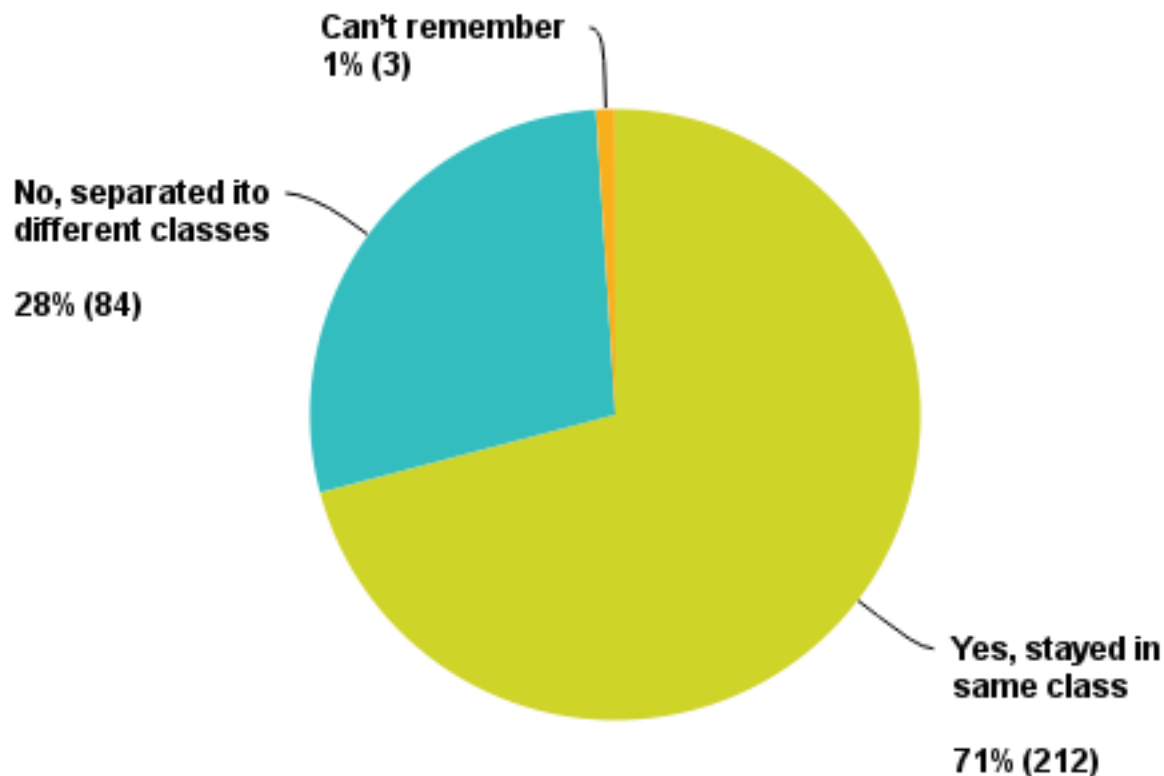


Twins who attended a primary school with at least two classes (or they could not recall the number of classes) were more than twice as likely to be kept together in the same class (69%) than separated (29%). These proportions did not vary significantly between identical and non-identical twins.

(NB. These proportions were similar in those twins definitely recalling there were 2+ classes, with 65% being in the same class).

Q8. Did you and your twin stay in the same class throughout primary school?

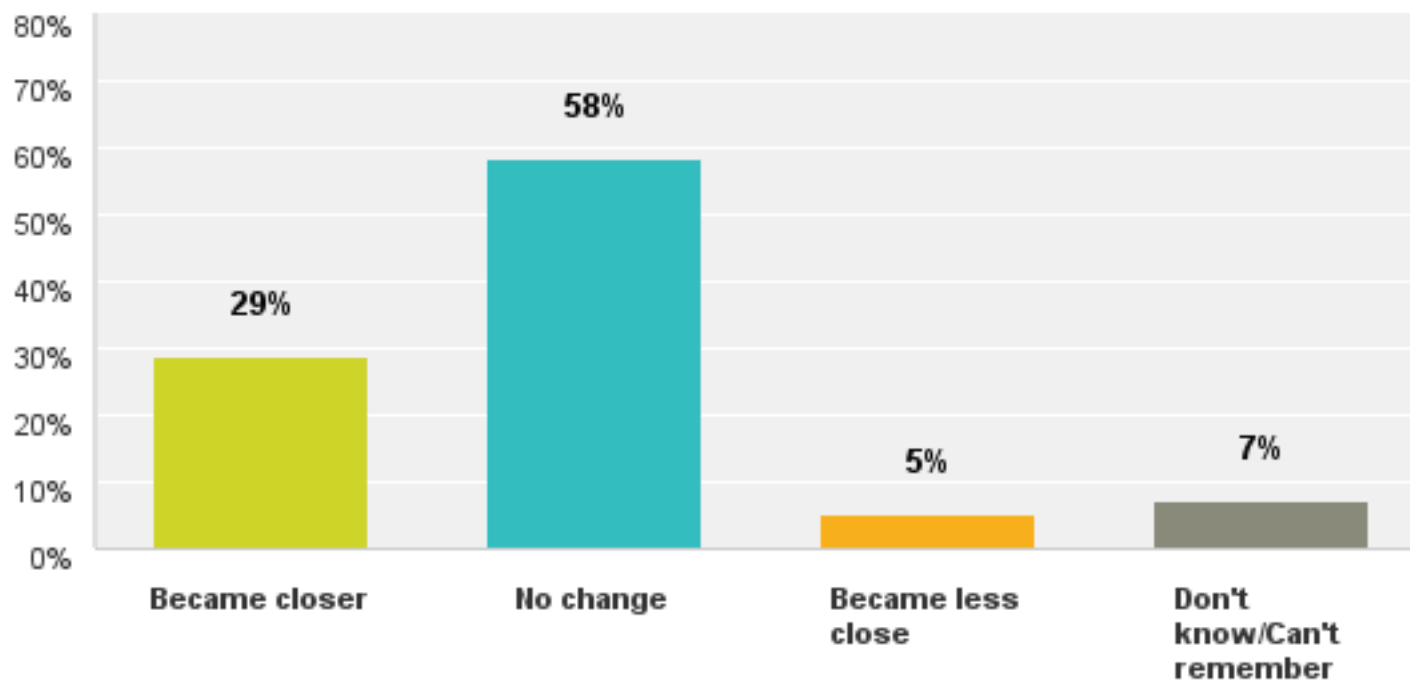
(Base: Twins put together in same class; n=299)



However, nearly three in ten twins (28%) who were initially put in the same class were later separated from their twin and placed into different classes.

Q9. How do you think being in the same class at primary school affected your twin relationship?

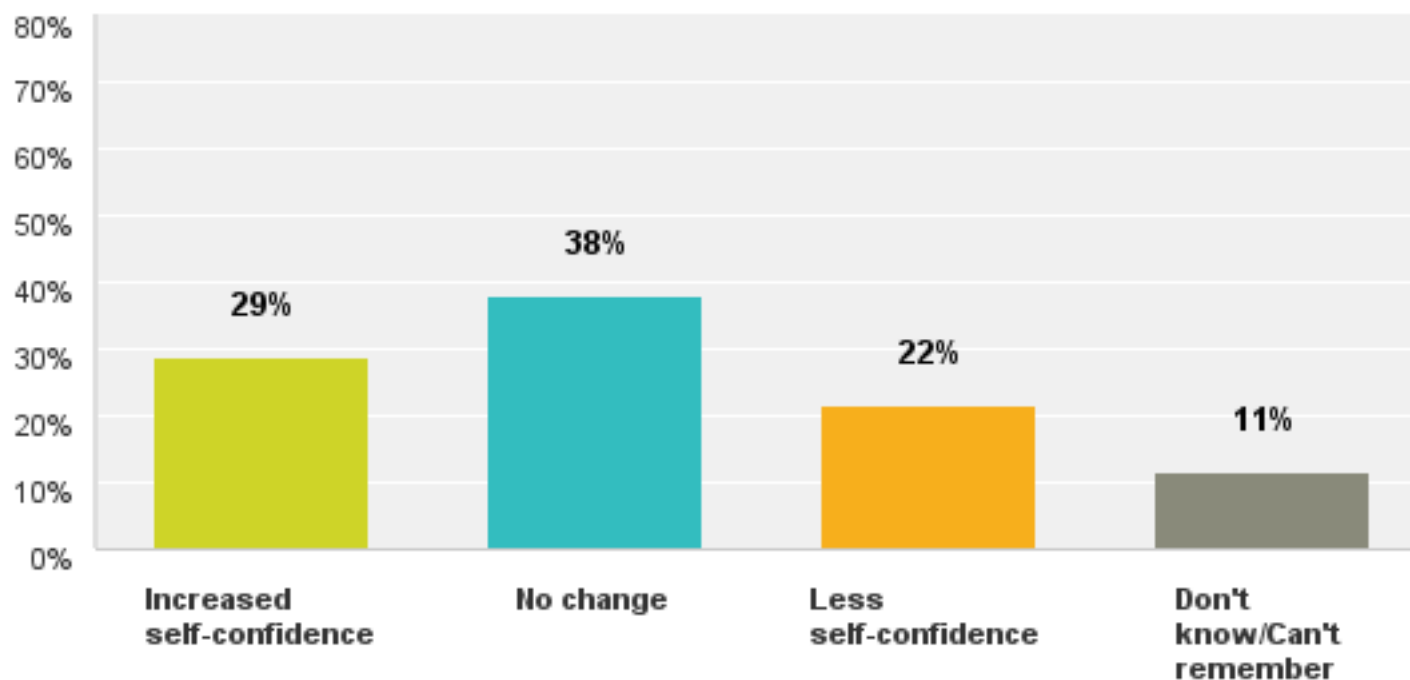
(Base: Twins in same class at primary school; n=438)



The majority of twins (58%) who were kept in the same class at primary school felt this did not affect the closeness of their relationship, but three in ten (29%) felt it made them closer. Non identical twins (DZ) were significantly more likely to say being in the same class made them less close (10%) compared with identical (MZ) twins (3%).

Q10. How do you think being in the same class at primary school affected your self confidence?

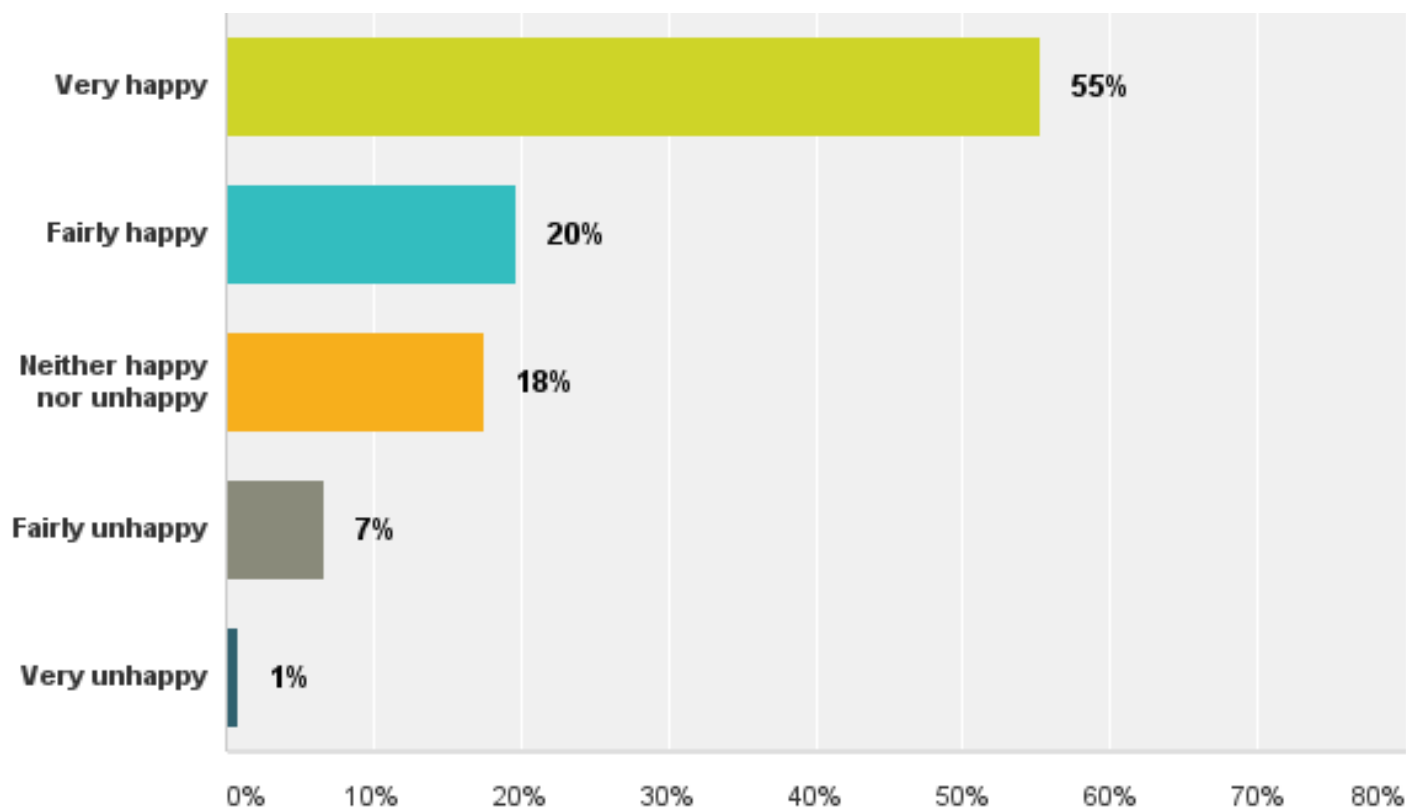
(Base: Twins in same class at primary school; n=438)



Three in ten twins (29%) who were kept in the same class felt it increased their self confidence, although nearly as many (22%) felt it made them less self confident. There was no difference between MZ and DZ twins in their responses.

Q11. On reflection, how happy or unhappy are you that you and your twin were in the same class at primary school?

(Base: Twins in same class at primary school; n=438)



Overall, three in four twins (75%) are very or fairly happy that they were in the same class as their twin at primary school. MZ twins were significantly more likely to say they are very happy (59%) compared with DZ twins (46%). DZ twins were significantly more likely to report they are very or fairly unhappy (14%) about being in the same class at primary school compared with MZ twins (6%).

Q12. Why were you then separated into different classes?

(Base: Q8 = Twins separated after being in same class; n=84)

Although some twins could not recall why they were separated from being in the same class, these quotes reflect the responses given by most respondents

“So we could be individuals and make our own friends. also the other children saw us as one person not two”

“In Year 4 & 5 our mother agreed for us to be separated as I was not very confident and an attempt to make me more independent.”

“Because I copied her work and wasn't independent - didn't see the need to do it as she had already done it.”

“The teachers couldn't tell us apart”

Q13. As far as you can recall, what were your feelings **at the time** towards the decision to separate you from your twin?

(Base: 203=129 separated initially + 84 separated later)

Respondents were almost equally divided between having positive and negative recalled reactions to being separated into different classes at primary school. A few respondents acknowledged that one twin found it easier than the other to cope with this separation.

Positive reactions included being pleased, fine with it, didn't worry, enjoyed it, adapted to it and some even preferred it.....

"We wanted to be in different classes so that we could have our own identity as we were always called "the twins".

"Didn't worry about it too much as we would see each other at playtime."

"totally happy with it"

"fine"

Negative reactions included being upset, tearful, shocked, unsettled, lost, confused, lonely and scared.....

"I remember being unhappy about being separated. I was scared and didn't want to be without my twin sister."

"Horrendous experience - one of the worst days of my life!"

"unhappy, remember that we both cried"

"Sad and upset, and scared"

Q14. What are your feelings **now** towards the decision to separate you from your twin?

(Base: 203=129 separated initially + 84 separated later)

The vast majority of respondents now **felt positively** towards the decision to separate them from their twin during primary school years, suggesting that many of those twins who were initially upset or concerned about separation overcame this and adapted well.

"I think it was the best decision. It taught me independence and allowed my personality to develop individually."

"It was a good thing in retrospect and helped us develop our own separate identities in a healthy, normal way."

"It is a must! We would have been too reliant on each other and it would have made it harder in later life."

"good decision, we both had our own set of friends."

"Better apart"

"The best thing that could have happened"

However, a few twins still feel now that separating them was the **wrong decision**.

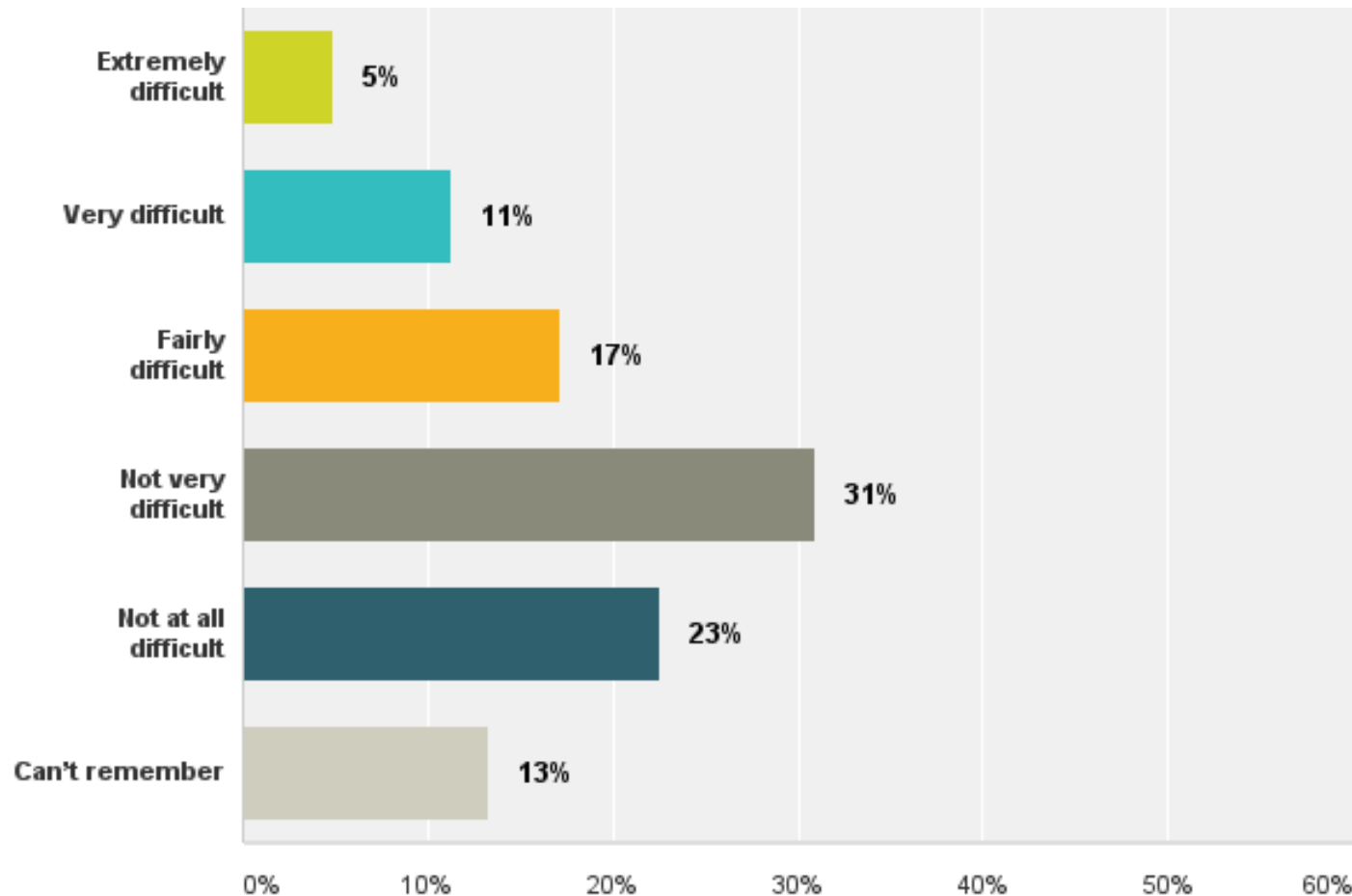
"It was an error. We would've been far better off together."

"It was too much of a wrench at such an early age."

"Angry. We were never asked what we wanted."

Q15. How difficult was it for you to separate from your twin?

(Base: Twins separated into different classes during primary school; n=203)

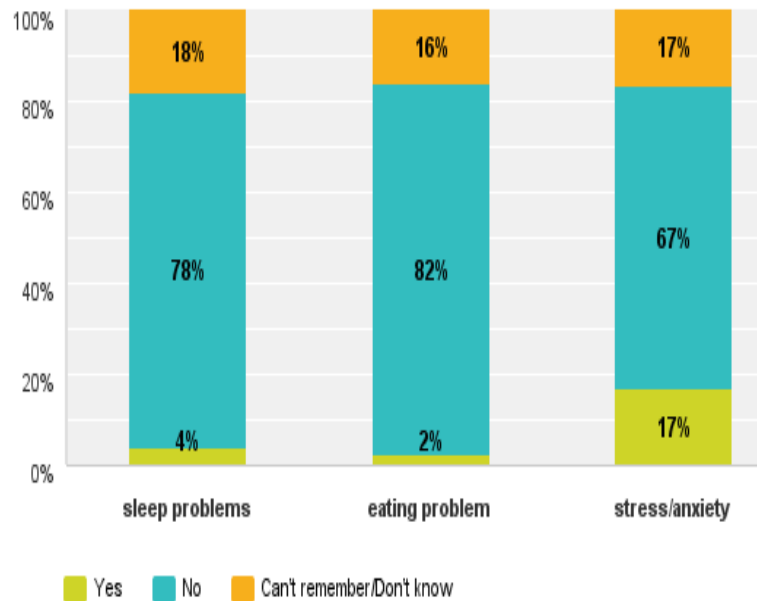


Just over half the twins who were in different classes (54%) did not find it difficult to separate from their twin at primary school. One in twenty (5%) found it extremely difficult and a further one in ten (11%) found it very difficult to separate from their twin. There were no differences between zygositys.

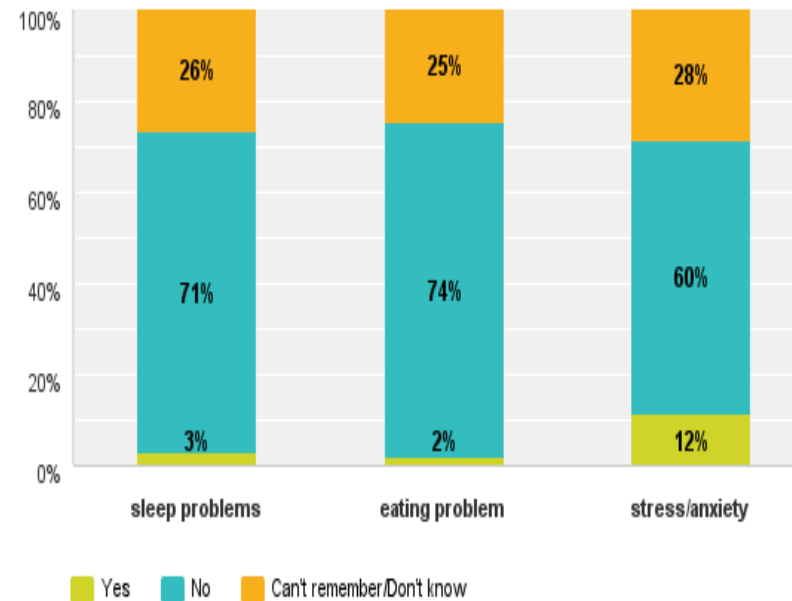
Q16 & Q17. As far as you can recall, did separation result in any of the following problems for you or your twin?

(Base: Twins separated into different classes during primary school; n=203)

Q16.you?



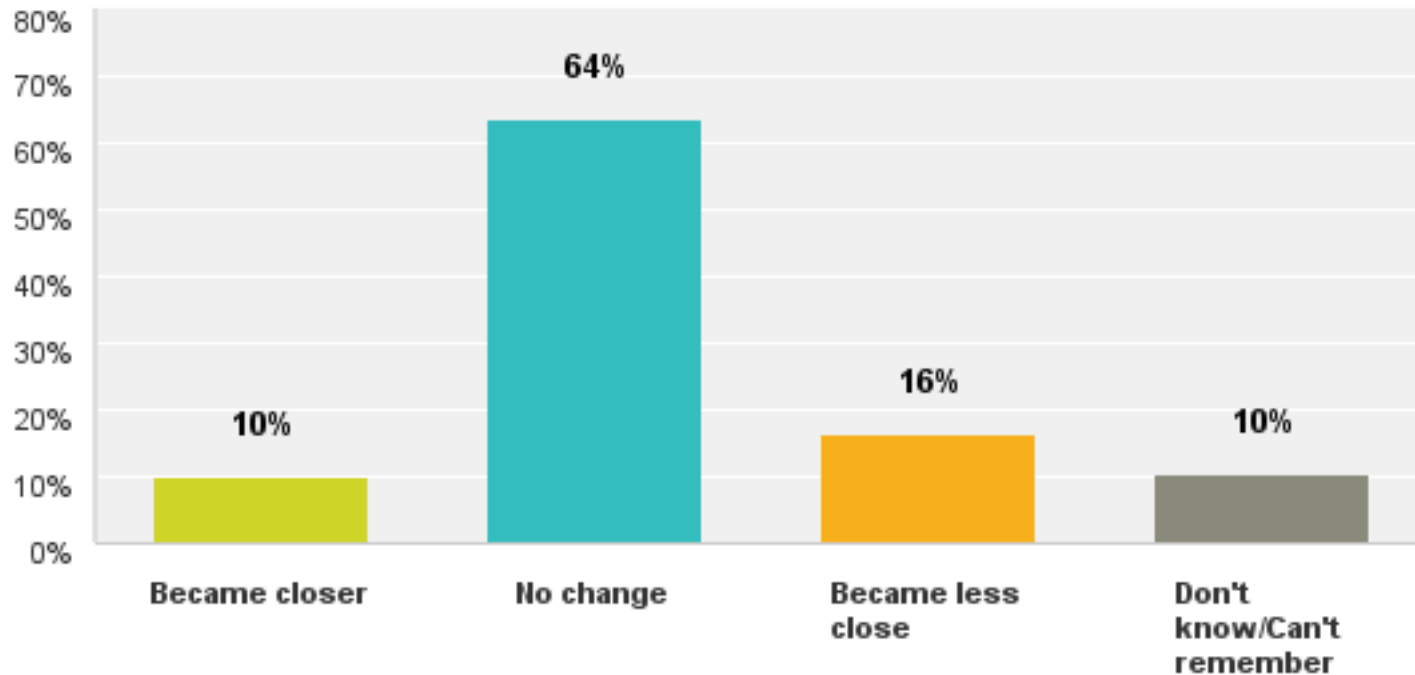
Q17.your twin?



The vast majority of twins did not recall any problems with sleeping, eating or stress for either themselves or their twin following their separation into different classes. Stress or anxiety was the most likely problem to be reported by a twin (17%), but up to a quarter of twins could not recall (or did not know) if separation resulted in any problems for either themselves or their twin.

Q18. How do you think being in a different class from your twin affected your twin relationship?

(Base: Twins separated into different classes during primary school; n=203)

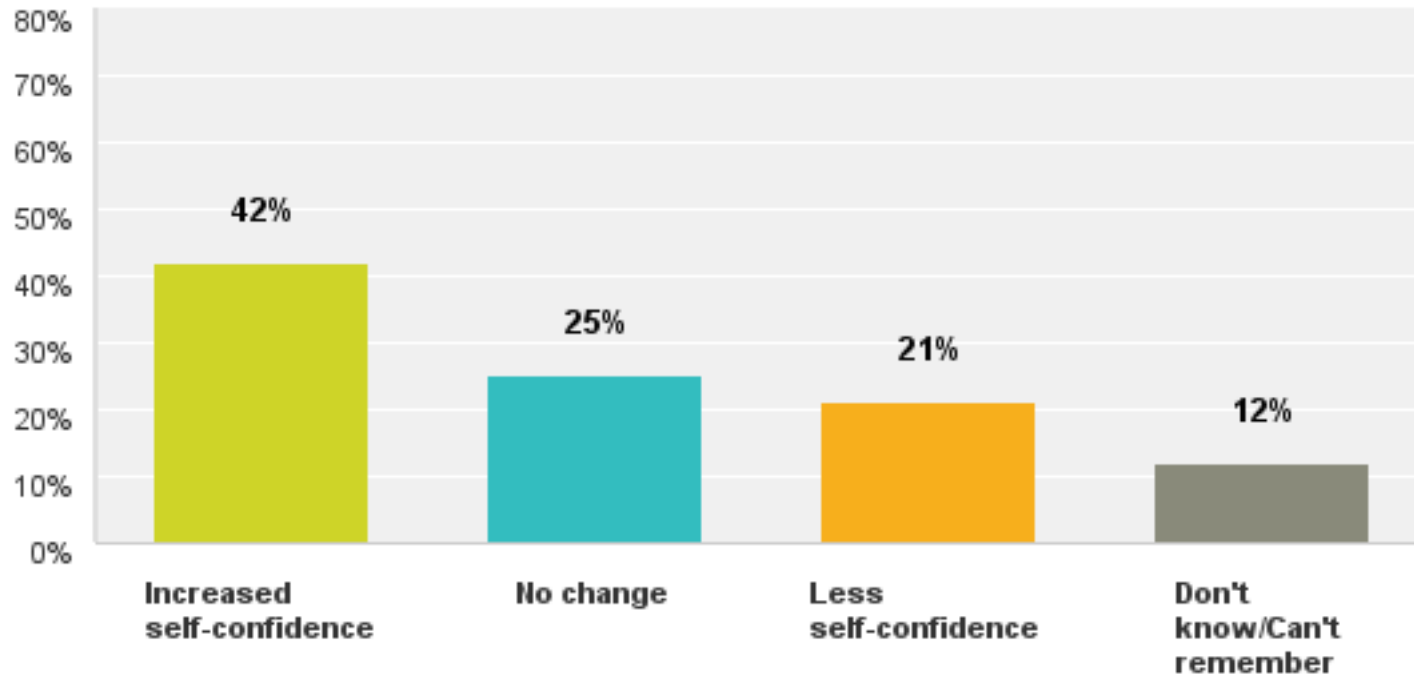


Two in three twins overall (64%) reported no change in their twin relationship as a result of being in different classes and only 16% felt they became less close. Differences between identical and non-identical twins were not significant.

Comparison of these results with Q9 show that twins kept in the same class were significantly more likely to report becoming closer to their twin than twins in different classes (29% and 10% respectively).

Q19. How do you think being in a different class from your twin affected your self confidence?

(Base: Twins separated into different classes during primary school; n=203)



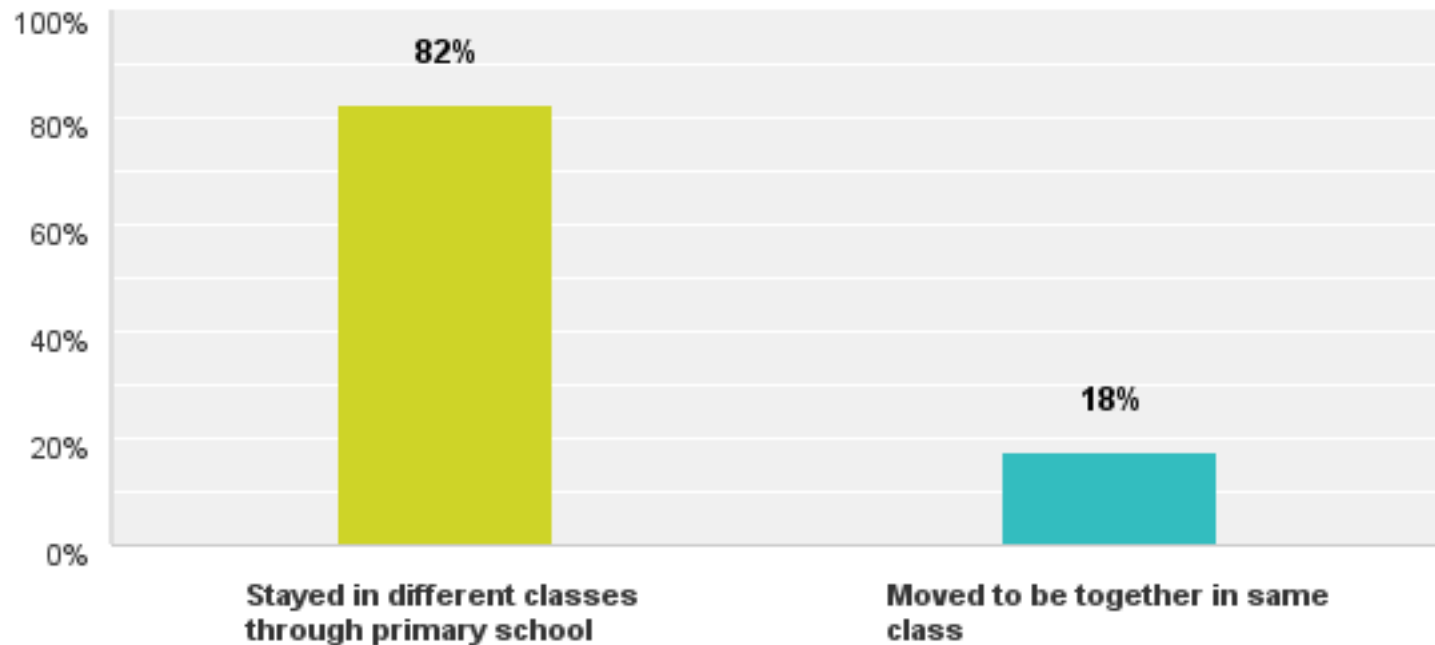
Twins who were separated into different classes were twice as likely to say this led to an increase in their self confidence (42%) rather than a decrease (21%) with one in four (25%) reporting no change.

Differences between zygosity were not significant.

Comparison of these results with Q10 show that twins in different classes were significantly more likely to report gaining in self confidence compared with twins in the same class (42% and 29% respectively).

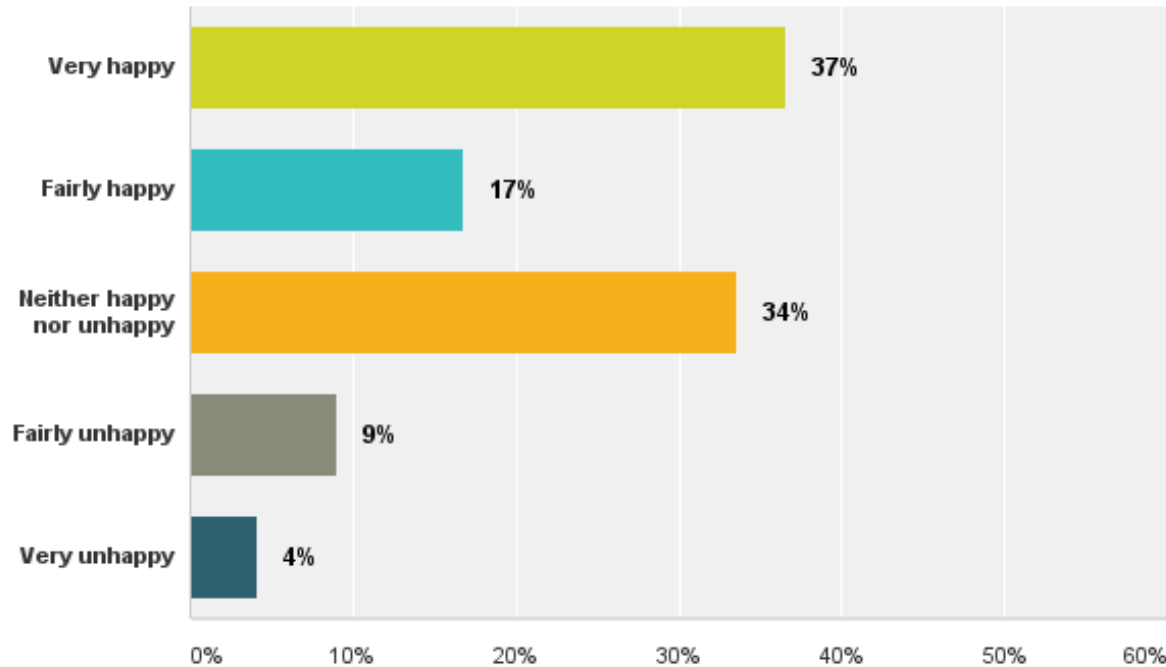
Q20. Did you stay in different classes throughout primary school or were you moved together into the same class?

(Base: Twins separated into different classes during primary school; n=203)



Although the vast majority of twins who were placed separately did stay in different classes throughout primary school (82%), one in five (18%) were later moved to be together in the same class.

Q21. On reflection, how happy or unhappy are you that you and your twin were in different classes at primary school?
(Base: Q20=twins staying in different classes throughout primary school; n=167)



Just over half the twins who stayed in different classes throughout primary school were either very or fairly happy about this separation (54%), with a further one in three (34%) expressing indifference. Differences between zygosity were not significant. Comparison of these results with Q11 show that twins kept in the same class were significantly more likely to be very or fairly happy about this placement compared with twins who were separated into different classes (75% and 54% respectively).

Q22. Please explain why and at what age you and your twin were moved into the same class at primary school?

(Base: Q20=twins moved together to be in same class, n=36)

Moving to a school where there was only one class was the most frequent reason given for twins being moved together into the same class after being separated into different classes.

Some twins could not recall why they were moved together, but a few cited emotional reasons and/or mother's decision for their being moved.

"My mum insisted we were put in class together shortly into term."

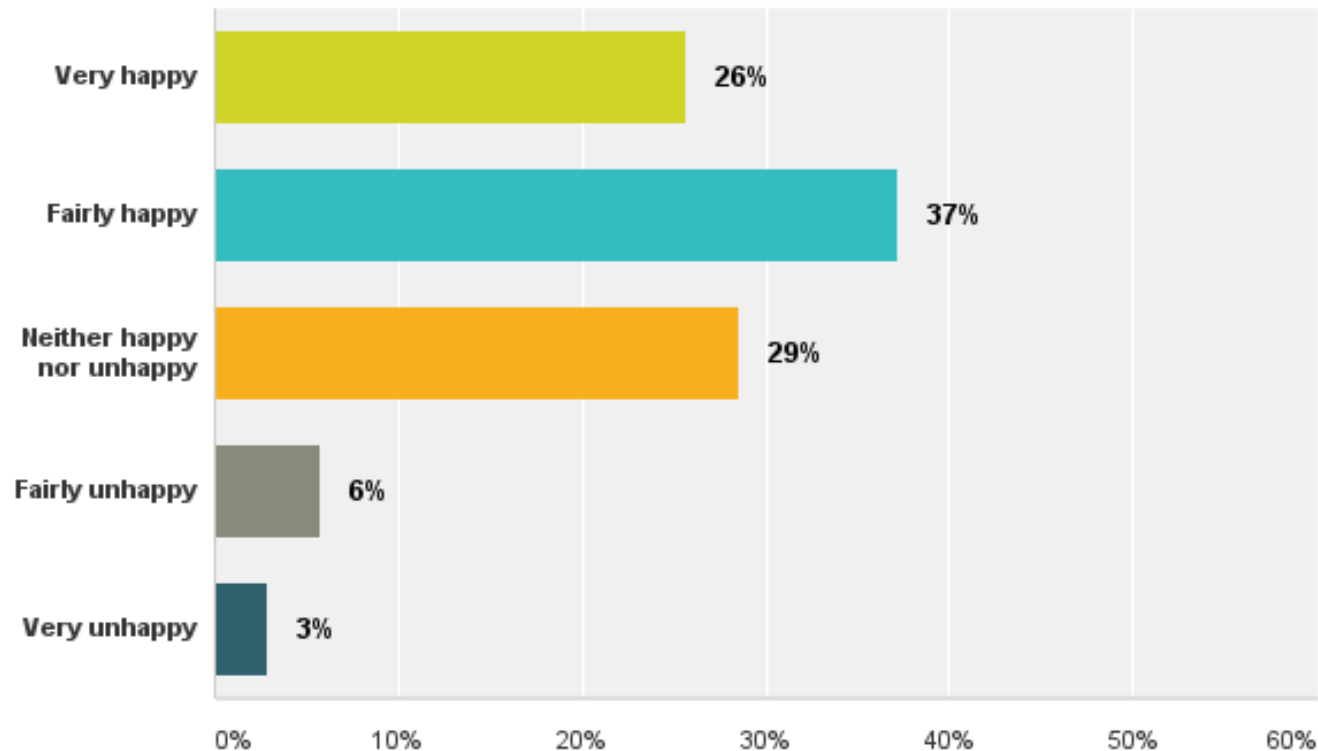
"We were not separated long due to the stress this caused me and especially my twin so ages 7 we put back in the same class."

"Because my sister refused to work in reception if we weren't in the same class so we were moved back in year 1"

"I believe it was our third year in primary school they split us up, but our grades dropped so they put us back in the same class for the last year of primary."

Q23. On reflection, how happy or unhappy are you that you and your twin were moved into the same class at primary school?

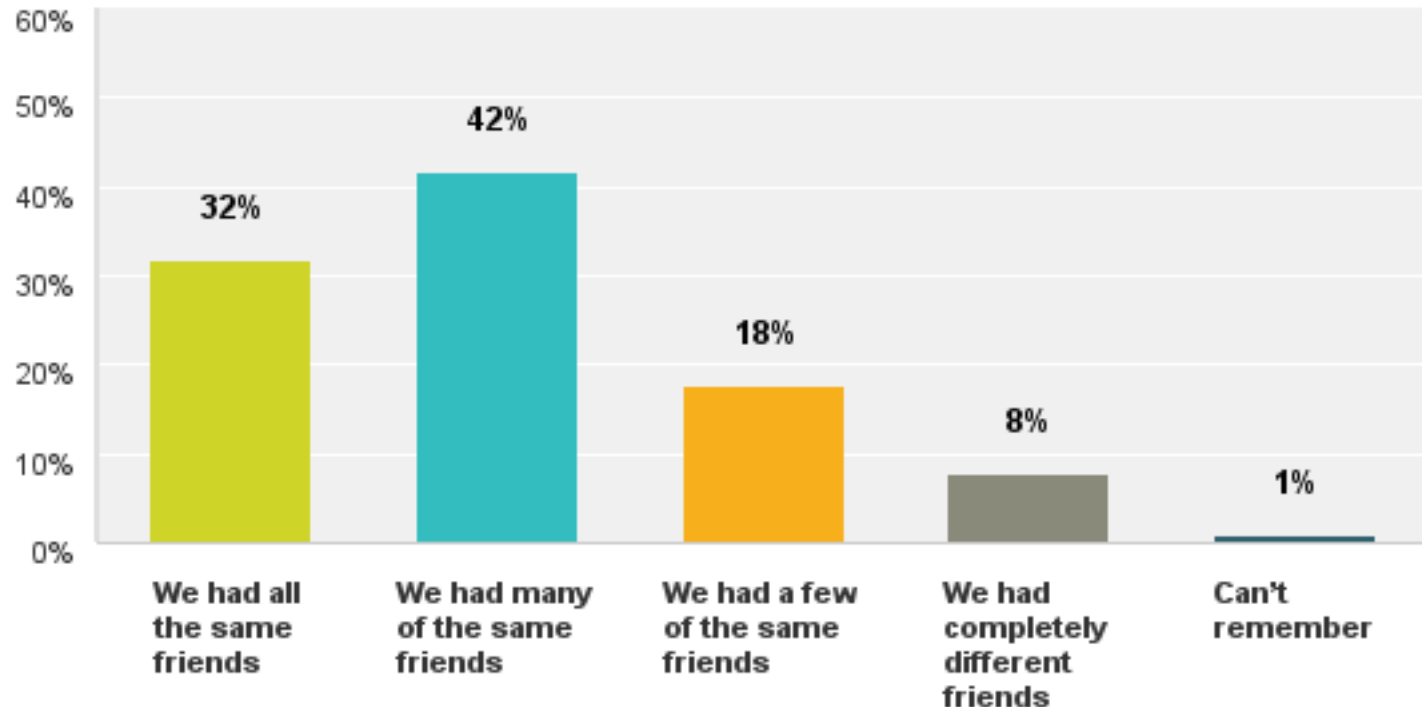
(Base: Twins separated then moved together; n=35)



Only a few twins who were moved into the same class after being separated into different classes were unhappy about this. Most were either very or fairly happy.

Q24. Did you and your twin have the same or different friends during your primary school years?

(Base: All respondents; n=645)



Overall, one in three twins reported sharing all the same friends as their twin during primary school years (32%). However, identical twins were significantly more likely to report this than were non-identical twins (36% of MZ compared with 20% of DZ twins).

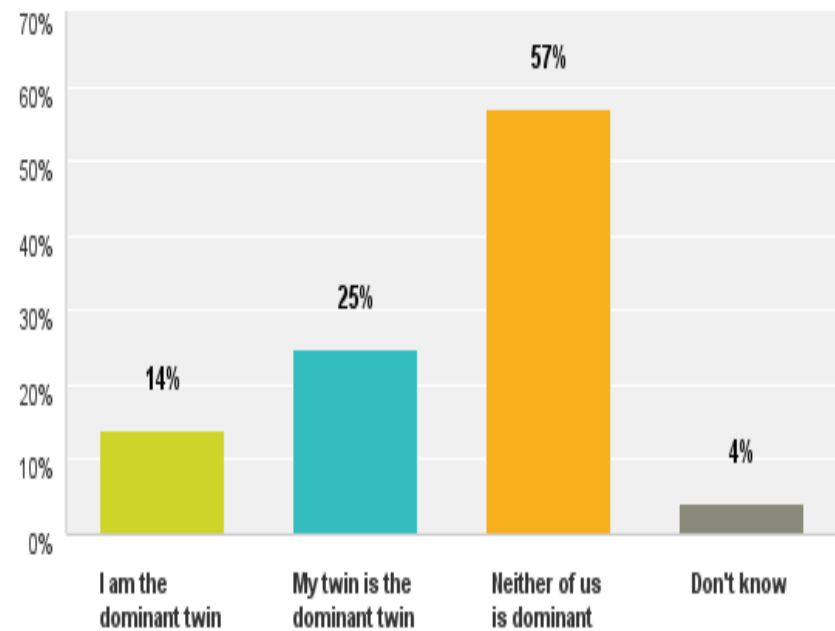
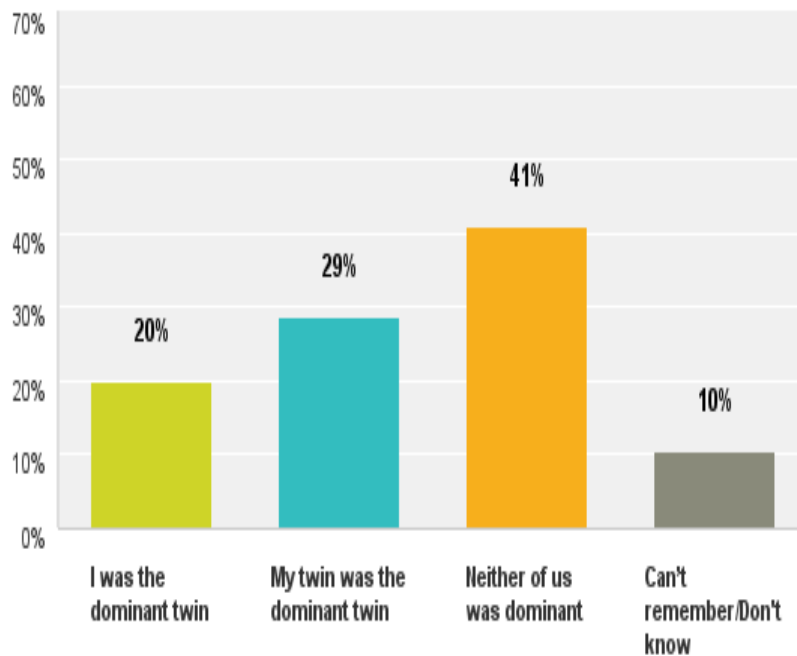
Non-identical twins were significantly more likely to recall having only a few of the same friends compared with identical twins (30% and 13% respectively).

Q25 & Q26. Would you say there was a dominant twin in your relationship during your primary school years and now?

(Base: All respondents; n=645)

Q25...primary school years

Q26...now



During primary school years, half the twins overall (49%) felt one twin was dominant in their relationship, but this proportion has dropped to two in five (39%) who currently feel this way, with the majority of twins now feeling there is not a dominant twin in their relationship (57%).

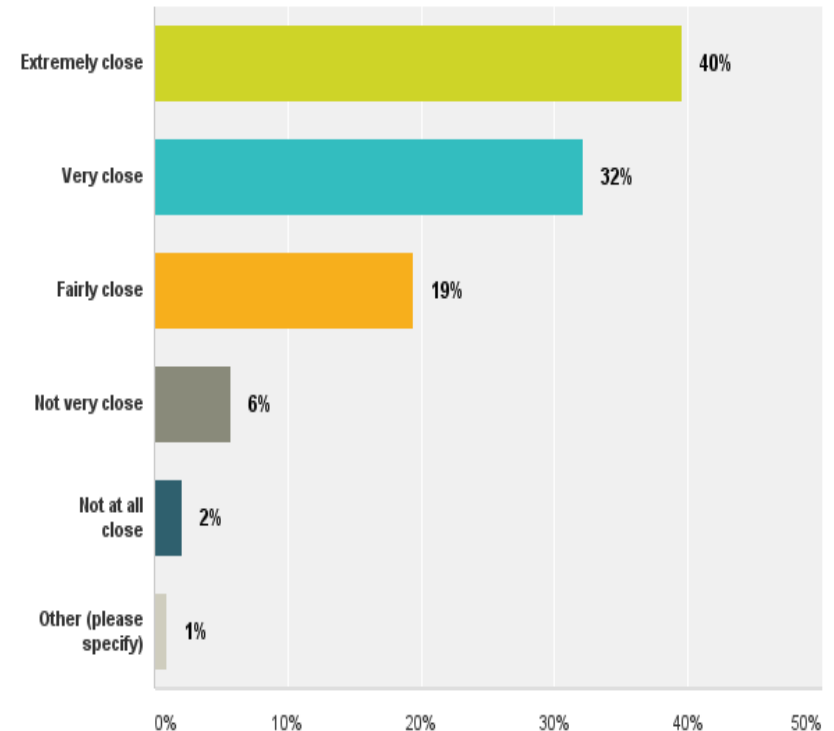
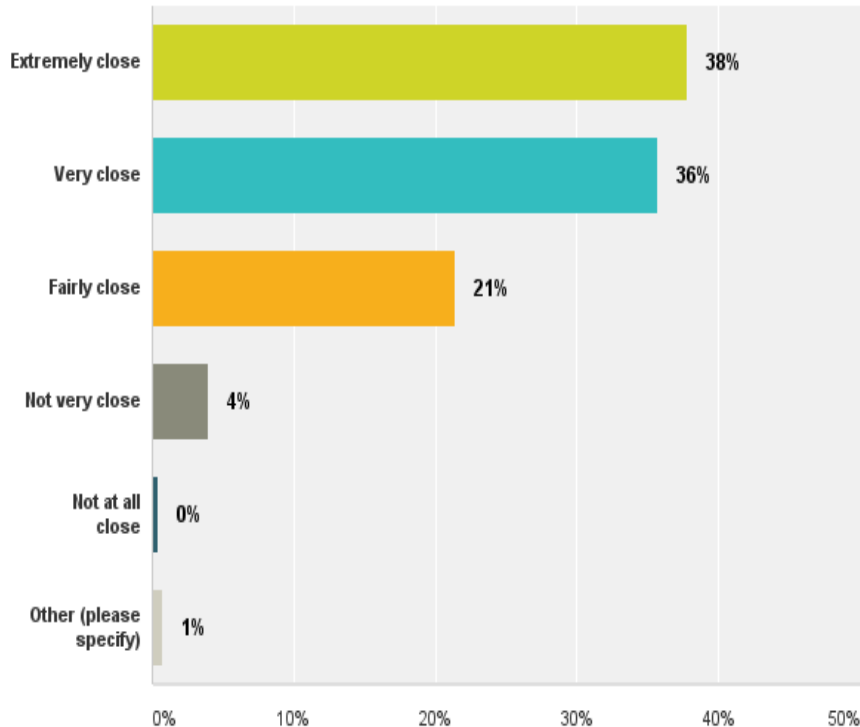
Non-identical twins were significantly more likely to feel there was a dominant twin during primary school years (56%) compared with identical twins (47%), but there is no difference in current feelings.

Q27 & Q28. How close was your relationship with your twin during primary school years and now?

(Base: All respondents; n=645)

Q27... primary school years

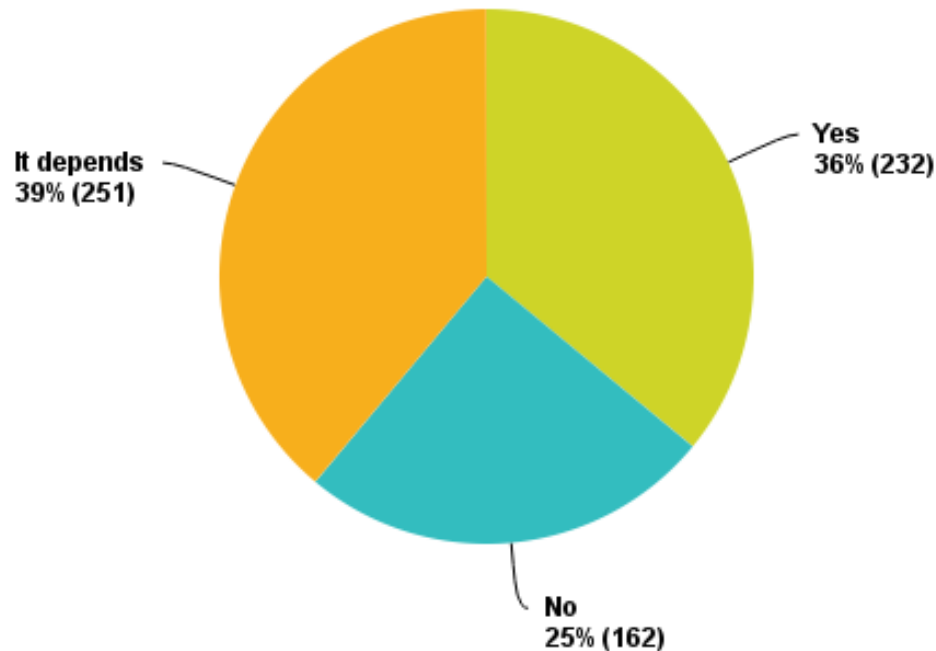
Q28...now



The vast majority of twins had an extremely or very close relationship during primary school (74%) and still do (72%). MZ twins are significantly more likely to report being extremely close to their twin both now (44%) and during primary school (42%) compared with DZ twins (29% now and 26% during primary school). DZ twins are significantly more likely to not feel close to their twin both now and during school.

Q29. Finally, do you think twins should be separated at primary school (if there is more than one class per year)?

(Base: All respondents; n=645)



Only one in four twins (25%) definitely felt twins should be kept together and not separated at primary school. A greater proportion (one in three, 36%) definitely felt twins should be separated. However, a similar proportion (39%) were not categorical in their view and felt “it depends”. Identical and non-identical twins did not differ in their views. The next question explores the reasoning behind the twins responses.

Q30. Please explain the reason/s for your previous response.....

YES, twins should be separated.....

"Twins are individuals and should be treated as such. It encourages them to make new friends and have their own friends too."

"Helps children get to know other friends and also better preparation for secondary school where separation is more likely and very under confident children can have problems."

"To develop as individuals, chance to determine your own personality, stops comparisons, easier to make friends with others, increases social interaction"

IT DEPENDS.....

"how close the twins are" "let them choose" "depends on the individual needs of each child"

"It depends on the twins relationship/inter-dependency and their educational abilities and degree of competitiveness. I believe parents and the twins themselves should be consulted. There should definitely not be a 'blanket rule' that all twins should be separated."

NO, twins should not be separated.....

"I believe twins should be able to flourish together, good teachers / schools will encourage independence and friendship."

"I think it is needlessly unkind to weaken a potential lifelong bond in the name of an experiment concerning short-term confidence. It's such a blessing to be a twin; don't detract from that blessing!"

"I think it can cause anxiety to separate them so early on."