

**Twins  
trust.**

We support  
twins, triplets  
and more...

FAMILY LIFE WITH

# **OLDER TWINS, TRIPLETS OR MORE**

(AGED 7 YEARS AND UPWARDS)



# CONTENTS & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## CONTENTS

---

**INTRODUCTION BY  
DR JOAN A FRIEDMAN** ..... 3

**FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS** ..... 4

- Boy-girl multiples ..... 4
- Model of twin relationships ..... 5
- Siblings ..... 8

**CHALLENGES** ..... 9

- Division of tasks and allocating roles ..... 9
- Competitive behaviour ..... 10
- Fighting and arguing ..... 11
- Top Tips for a calmer home ..... 11
- Parents' needs ..... 13

**GROWING WITH  
INDEPENDENCE** ..... 14

- Competition and opting out ..... 14
- Coming to terms with differences ..... 15
- Homework ..... 16
- Developing independence ..... 17
- Parents' evenings ..... 17
- Self image and identity ..... 18
- Sleepovers and residential trips ..... 19
- Puberty ..... 20

**INFORMATION, RESOURCES AND  
SUPPORT FROM TWINS TRUST** ..... 21

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

---

*Many thanks to the following contributors for providing ideas, suggestions, and corrections on the drafts of this booklet:*

*Louise Bowman, Carla Parkinson, Helen Regan, Helen Peck, Rafi Cooper and thank you to Joan A. Friedman for your support and sharing ideas to help produce the new content in this booklet.*

*This new version is based on an original booklet *Twins, triplets and more 7-11 guide* written by Audrey Sandbank, Diane Galloway, Anne Thomas, Janet O'Keefe, Judi Linney, Dr Erika McAslan Fraser.*

*We would like to thank all the parents who have shared their experiences and whose quotes appear in this booklet.*

---

*Whilst every care is taken in providing information, please note that it is of a general nature and that readers should seek professional or expert advice as appropriate to their specific circumstances.*

# INTRODUCTION: FOREWORD BY DR JOAN A FRIEDMAN

Dr. Joan A. Friedman is a prominent and well-respected twin expert.

She illuminates and exposes the layers of nuance in the twin connection: identity,

loyalty, co-dependence, separation and expectations.

## MESSAGE FROM DR JOAN A FRIEDMAN

---

It's so important to remain an active and involved parent throughout the crucial early years. Of course, adolescence can be challenging and questions will be asked (!), but your input and guidance will be as important as ever.

- Encourage your multiples to make separate friends. Even though it may be resisted initially, it's so important for them to create friends on their own. These experiences help to nurture self-reliance and confidence.
- Educate others about the fact that multiples want separate friends and experiences. Most non-twin parents feel uncomfortable about inviting only one twin or triplet over or to a party because they're concerned about leaving the other/s out. But you should clarify that it's great for them to have some separate experiences and it's part of their growth.
- Get comfortable with your multiples' differences. Be aware of your feelings towards all of your children and this will help you to work through feelings of ambivalence and guilt.
- Don't be overly concerned with your multiples fitting into the norms of expected multiple behaviour. Let them be who they are rather than insisting they be best friends and soulmates.

# FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Every family with twins, triplets or more will have a different set-up. You may have identical boys, identical girls, non-identical same sex or boy-girl twins, and then when it comes to triplets there are even more possibilities.

You may also have older or younger siblings within your family.

Many families are also blended with step-parents and step- or half- siblings. The group

dynamics will vary in different types of twins.

If a triplet group includes two identical girls, then the third child may feel excluded. If this child is a boy, he'll probably make his own friends at school, but a girl may need encouragement to do this, rather than worrying about being left out.

## BOY-GIRL MULTIPLES

---

The relationship between boy-girl twins can vary from extremely close to both choosing to lead independent lives.

Girls tend to mature faster than boys, often reaching puberty as much as two years earlier, and this different rate of maturity (both physical and emotional) can alter the relationship.

At this age, girls can tend to dominate academically, emotionally, socially and physically (growth-wise) and the boy-girl relationship may need to be sensitively handled. An earlier growth spurt can also

leave the boy feeling very much the 'discarded little brother' and others may look upon the girl as the 'big sister'.

It can be helpful to encourage the children's different identities and help them to feel comfortable within their external experiences.

If the boy twin is feeling overshadowed, he might benefit from time spent with an older male role model.

# MODEL OF TWIN RELATIONSHIPS

## PROFESSOR PAT PREEDY

The relationship between multiple birth children varies from those who seem distinct, independent individuals to those

who only seem to be able to function as a couple or unit. We describe the following three main multiple types:

### Extreme Individuals

**Twins may find their relationship with each other restrictive**

**May have separate friends**

**Might deny having a twin or have a dislike for each other**

**Mostly play alone**

**Competitive and might try to dominate over each other**

**Might be opposite extremes to establish individual identities**

**Does not share twin success**

# MODEL OF TWIN RELATIONSHIPS (CONTINUED)

Mature  
Dependent

Enjoy being  
together

Function well  
as a unit or as  
an individual

Might have  
separate and  
similar friends

Might pursue  
individual  
interests and  
friendships  
with others



# MODEL OF TWIN RELATIONSHIPS (CONTINUED)

## Closely Coupled

**See themselves  
as a unit and  
don't like to be  
separated**

**Might respond  
to each other's  
names**

**Might not be  
able to  
recognise own  
image in the  
mirror**

**Might have  
their own  
language**

**Might have few  
friends**

**Keep in  
pace with  
each other**

This research did include triplets within their samples. With triplet families this model will be more complex as the three children could be displaying the different types of relationships with their different siblings. These relationships can change according to context too for example at home and school. It can also change as the children get older.

The bond between twins, triplets and more can be special and the relationship can be a great source of support for the children. At times of stress and change, twins (especially

identical twins) may increasingly rely on this intimate bond and withdraw into their own support group where they may feel safer. Twins, triplets and more may also support each other in the face of opposition from others, particularly parents.

However, this reliance on each other can be particularly painful if one twin seeks the other twin's support and it is not reciprocated. The special relationship can also feel rejecting for other family members.

Eating together as a family at the table each

evening can be a great opportunity to bond as a family unit and hear about your children's school lives/friends/teachers/opinions. During this time, parents often pick up on concerns and worries (as the children can 'bounce' off each other), which they

can discuss with the individual child on a one-to-one basis later. Conversation at meal times also allows children to express their individuality, especially as children get older, whilst also bringing them together in their special relationship.

“ Healthy adult twins do not feel imprisoned by their twinship. They have acknowledged each other's right to be separate and unique while maintaining their special connection. They enjoy being together but do not require exclusive possession of one other in order to cope with life or other relationships.”

**Dr Joan A Friedman**

## SIBLINGS

Other children in the family need to have their individual needs considered as well. It can feel like quite a responsibility being the older sibling of multiples, and parents may expect the older child to grow up quicker. We need to remind ourselves not to expect too much. It can feel isolating for both older and younger siblings in the family if they are the only child outside of the multiple group and if there are two parents (or the parent has a partner). The way siblings relate to the group will depend very much on their personality and age difference.

Older siblings may be conscious of the bond between twins and can try to split family groupings. Depending on the age difference the older child may try to take charge of the multiples and lead the group.

Some strategies to help siblings feel included are:

- Give each child their own personal space and privacy.
- Do stuff together as a family. Ensure siblings are involved in special events like birthdays and decorating the Christmas tree.
- Create opportunities for the sibling to spend time with just one of their twin, triplet or higher order multiple siblings who will also enjoy the opportunity of having a different relationship.
- Siblings need time alone with parents too, for example, going to bed later than their siblings, if they are older.



# CHALLENGES

As we know having twins and triplets has many positives but the flip side to this is it can bring up challenges that may not occur

in families who've had several singletons. In this section we look at challenges specific to life in families with multiples.

## DIVISION OF TASKS AND ALLOCATING ROLES

---

Each child is unique and most likely will respond best to tasks and activities they show particular interest or ability in. However, even small differences in interests and abilities can become exaggerated with tasks being shared in an uneven way and roles being allocated from a young age. Because twins are a couple who usually spend all their childhood together, the division of both practical and emotional tasks may prevent them from developing certain skills. They can become like two pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, each needing the other to make them complete. One may do the talking while the other remains silent or chimes in at the end of sentences. One twin may lead, the other follow, letting the first twin test out the ground. One makes the friends and the other may be less social. Why can't one be tidy like the other? Because the other is doing it for her! Such

twins may be closer because they are stuck together by their need for the skills of the other, although they may appear to be very different in personality.

The couple effect, with its division of tasks between twins, is possibly the greatest cause of worry for parents and teachers. However, if twins are treated as separate individuals and encouraged to have their own friends and interests, as well as shared ones, they will learn to develop the skills that are needed when their twin is not available.

While twins, triplets and more are likely to remain conscious of similarities and differences, the more they feel valued for themselves and their own gifts, the less likely they are to get upset by differences in looks and abilities.



## COMPETITIVE BEHAVIOUR

---

Rivalry is quite normal in siblings' relationships, but parents of multiples may need to watch how competitive behaviour impacts upon schoolwork, family relationships, friends, hobbies and daily life. For example, identical twins in competition may deliberately hold back and pace themselves on each other, whilst non-identical twins in the same situation may try harder to beat the other!

Multiples can be very competitive and if they are doing the same activity it is important to encourage them to compete against their own personal best rather than that of a brother or sister. This applies to schoolwork as well. If the children have very similar interests, perhaps they can be encouraged to try different branches of the same activity, for example, cricket and tennis, or the flute and the oboe. Healthy competition can of course be beneficial when children spur each other on and are pleased with each other's successes.

If you have triplets or more, then the desire

to encourage different activities will be balanced by the logistical problems of getting them there; a compromise will be inevitable. One parent said 'It is dreadfully difficult sometimes and you do feel very guilty.' Try not to feel guilty; 'good enough' is fine – don't aim to be perfect. Different clubs and activities can give parents the opportunity to have quality time with each of their children.

Sometimes it is impossible or not desirable to persuade them to do different things, for example you may want all your children to attend swimming lessons to gain a level of proficiency and safety and this can have the practical advantage of involving fewer trips.

However, multiples who are in the same class at school will benefit from some independence and separation out of school. It will help to prepare them for separation later on.

# FIGHTING AND ARGUING

---

As children become more articulate, their behaviour can be more challenging for parents. Two or more multiples arguing their case together can be very persuasive, or if their tongues are turned on each other it can feel as if all hell has broken loose! Fighting and arguing are often symptoms of a lack of personal space and competition for one or both parents.

Arguments also often result from competition and a need for a child to assert his identity if he feels that he is not getting his fair share of the parent's love and interest. Quality time on a regular basis will help to reassure a child that he matters and is valued by the parent. Twins often fall into arguments if they have too little separation and feel stifled by the constant presence of the other. More separation where possible will help to reduce this. Multiples will also use fights as

a way of getting extra negative attention and ignoring is often the best policy.

Stand your ground and don't be drawn into a shouting match. Look out for the more articulate child setting up the other, who may retaliate physically. He/she is often deemed to be out-of-order and can get labelled as 'the difficult one'. Watch the change when s/he realises you've sussed out the twin/triplet and s/he stops being blamed all the time!

Children can be very skilled at pressing our buttons. The more able the child, the more skilled they become. The best response is not rising to the bait. They haven't won just because we don't have the last word, or we haven't implemented a sanction; they have only won if we respond negatively!

## TOP TIPS FOR A CALMER HOME



**Feeling understood and heard** is basic to any well-connected relationship, so it is important to spend time just listening to children's worries, but also their achievements and general daily activities. If children seem to be using worries to get their parent's attention, ask them to save the discussion for a time when they are on their own with us, hopefully before bedtime that evening.



# TOP TIPS FOR A CALMER HOME (CONTINUED)



**Listening is the most important thing** we can do for our multiples and making time to listen is important, but it should not become a weapon used by a child for getting negative attention. This age group can be very good at getting attention by presenting us with a worry or problem that we feel we should really listen to and be sympathetic. Bedtimes are often used as an opportunity to get the parent to stop and have more than the usual five minutes goodnight chat. A worry box (where children write down their concerns and post it in an agreed box) can also be helpful for putting away the worries.



**Giving each child an opportunity to have time** on their own with their parents will help their confidence and self-esteem. Time alone without siblings can also help children to build their sense of identity. Each child needs love, hugs and praise every day away from the prying eyes and ears of the others. Find time to enjoy each of your children, even if it's just going round the supermarket together.



**Incentives and rewards can be a useful strategy** to encourage good behaviour, for example helping around the house, stopping an argument by the count of ten, or other tasks and behaviours that the parent is having problems with – but not too many! A few rules, kept, are better than becoming a constant nagger, so decide which battles are worth fighting! Ensure that all the children can earn roughly the same number of rewards by making the tasks appropriate to the child.



## PARENTS' NEEDS

---

Finally, don't forget yourselves. On the rare occasion when you can arrange for all the children to have a sleepover with a friend or relative, or for each to stay with a different friend or relative, arrange a really special evening for yourself and your partner, or yourself and a friend if you are on your own.

It might just be possible to take time off when the children are at school.

If you are both working, maybe you could meet up for lunch or take a half day off and go to an afternoon movie.



As a parent of 10 year old twins it can feel lonely as I do not have as much contact with other parents like when they were younger so I feel I have fewer opportunities to share my worries, ideas and expectations. The Twins Trust Community Forum is really good at connecting parents with the same age children where we can chat and offer peer support to each other."

**Mum of twins**

# GROWING WITH INDEPENDENCE

In this next section we are going to take a deeper look at how our twins, triplets and more will develop in all areas, both

physically and emotionally and how we can encourage the start of their independence as they approach becoming a teenager.

## COMPETITION AND 'OPTING OUT'

---

Children of 8+ years seem to develop a sensitive awareness of 'fairness' whilst simultaneously developing an intense desire to compete and succeed. Nowhere is this more obvious than on the football field where there are often too many strikers and very few defenders!

If twins are already competitive, this is the time it is likely to stick out most.

Trivial differences and occasions can be magnified into mountainous differences, so be prepared for the occasional rocky road. Children need to learn to deal with their differences, so it is wise to encourage them to step back from strong argument (and sometimes physical violence!) and instead learn to negotiate and explain their thoughts, feelings and wishes in a self-controlled way.

It is not at all unusual for one twin to dominate, sometimes intellectually,

sometimes socially, perhaps both. Other children can exacerbate differences of this nature and try to drive a wedge between multiple birth siblings. It is hard for parents to intervene in such matters, but it is important for you to try to understand what is happening and, where possible, help your children deal with these situations in a positive way. It is at times necessary to challenge 'accepted' perceptions, especially where one twin is avoiding something ('opting out') in order to avoid competition with his/her twin. For example, one twin may avoid competitive sport, or choose not to participate in an activity, for fear of being seen to fail when compared with their twin. This can lead to one child missing out on valuable experiences.

[www.twineducation.org/policy-checklists/competition-inventory-twins](http://www.twineducation.org/policy-checklists/competition-inventory-twins).

# COMING TO TERMS WITH DIFFERENCES

The increased amount of testing and greater quantity of homework will conspire to throw a spotlight on children's abilities and behaviour.

Test results may be out of your hands and grading may reward one child too often and make the other(s) feel cheated. How you handle this as a family is important. Life is not always fair and sometimes one person gets a lot of 'breaks' and another doesn't (this is true of treats and parties too).

Who you actually are is much more important than how well you score at tests, so this is a good time in your children's lives to help them come to terms with differences, whilst learning to celebrate who they really are.

Your children need to know that you love them equally for who they are and not for what they achieve or how they behave.

## **Fight the urge to compare your twins, triplets or more by following some of these tips:**

- Practice answers with them for when they get asked probing questions from outsiders, for instance, 'who is older?', 'who is smarter?' Help your children to come up with a response. If family members or friends compare your multiples, speak to them in private and explain how it is not helpful.
- Never allow teachers to compare grades of one twin to the other. Insist on knowing how the individual children compare to all the peers in their class/year group.
- Downplay their birth order, don't call them the older or younger sibling as this can cause rivalry between them.
- As parents, try not to compare them, keep consequences focused on the child in question and never use their co-twin to compare. The same goes for praise, ensure you are praising the individual child for their actions.



## HOMWORK

---

Homework can be a challenge, especially when it requires a lot of parental support. You cannot split yourself in half as a parent, so it is a good idea to establish clear homework rules in your family.

Identify who is working where in the house; make sure that one child is not enjoying a noisy game when sibling(s) are trying to concentrate; try to share out your own time fairly and, if the pressures on you get too great, draft in help from another family member, or a good friend. Of course, all rules are made to be broken, so any system must take into account the need to be flexible –especially if one of the children is undergoing a homework crisis! Parents of twins often find homework a thorny issue – parents of triplets+ will recognise that the challenge they face is multiplied by more than 3! You may well need that extra pair of hands at times.

Be aware that children have unique preferred learning styles: one may work better in a quiet space, another may need music; one likes to work at a table, another lying on the floor; one works in sustained

chunks of time, another in mini-bursts – with lots of stops for snacks; one works privately, another needs to talk about what (s)he is doing and get lots of parental feedback. This is normal: even identical twins do not necessarily think and work alike. Do not automatically assume that one way is right and another wrong (although you may need to intervene if productivity dips too low!)

If you have children working on the same homework, use this to your advantage. For example, getting them to brainstorm together on possible answers and help each other with difficult problems can encourage social skills and problem solving together. But, after the discussions, the written work must always be done separately, ideally in different rooms. Peer reading can be a lifesaver when you have two or more reading the same book; there are only so many times you can read the same reading homework. If the children have to take something into school for a project or 'show and tell', try to find something different for each of them to take in. It may be small, but then they all have something.

## DEVELOPING INDEPENDENCE

---

Help your children to develop responsibility and the personal organisation skills needed as they grow older. For example, encourage them to take responsibility for their homework books, packing their bags and ensuring they have the right equipment at school each day.

Any children travelling on school transport will also need to develop skills in order to cope independently. One advantage that multiple birth children have is that they can face these new challenges with the support of their sibling(s).

## PARENTS' EVENINGS

---

Parents' evenings are good opportunities to discuss progress and development, but it will become increasingly important to organise separate full-length appointments for each child. Do not be beguiled into discussing both or all children together (a common pitfall if they share a teacher) as it is not only difficult to avoid comparisons, but a couple of days later it is almost impossible to remember what was said about each of them. This will be an even harder challenge for your memory once they begin to be taught by different teachers for different subjects, so it is perhaps a good idea to start taking a notebook along to meetings with you and explain that it is to

help you to remember what is said about each child.

If there are aspects of your children's progress that are very much linked with their multiple birth relationship, it would then (and only then) be worthwhile discussing them together. However, perhaps that kind of discussion would be better held separately, at another time – particularly if there is likely to be a prolonged dialogue about progress in a specifically twin-based context, such as competitiveness or opting out, or relationships with other children. It can be useful to include the children in such discussions.



## SELF-IMAGE AND IDENTITY

---

The whole issue of separateness, of self-image and identity tends to reappear at any transition. You may have the opportunity and wish to have the children taught in separate classes at this stage.

Big transitions are not always a good time to introduce big changes, so think carefully about splitting on entry to Key Stage 2 and in Junior School. Whatever you decide, involve your children in the decision, if you can, and make sure that you lay good foundations for any new separation.

Whatever the pattern in school, expect the opposite reaction at home. So, if the children are separated for the first time in Year 3, you may find they want to share a

room more often at home. Conversely, if they are together at school they may need a bit more 'space' at home. Try to be sensitive to these needs – but there is no need to move house just to provide them with separate rooms!

The subject of 'telling them apart' can be an issue at this stage. You may find that they are looking less alike as they grow up, or, conversely, more alike. School uniforms do not allow for many variations, but shoes, jumpers and hairstyles are all methods which have been successfully used. Most of the time there should not be a problem telling them apart, but it can be a safety issue in P.E., swimming or during playtime, so give it some thought.



## SLEEPOVERS AND RESIDENTIAL TRIPS

---

As your children develop socially, there are likely to be an increasing number of out of school activities they can become involved in, including parties, outings, 'sleep-overs' and playing at friends' houses. It remains a good idea to talk to other parents so that they feel more relaxed about inviting your twins+ to their house – some parents are daunted by twins and some will feel that they must invite all and not just one of a multiple birth 'group'. Encourage your children to both share friends and have their own friends. A mixture is natural and good for them – both celebrating and ignoring the multiple birth relationship.

School residential trips may be the time when multiple birth children have their first taste of being away from home. School trips often happen shortly before the transition to secondary education. Teachers

may not realise that twins have had fewer opportunities than their peers to be away from home. They may also need to understand that twins naturally tend to seek reassurance from each other when unsure of themselves. With gentle support and understanding, they can be helped to grow in independence and develop their coping skills for separation. It is important to talk to teachers/scout leaders about groupings for activities and bedrooms/ tents.

The leaders may assume that your multiples will want to be together, and if they do that's fine. But this may be an ideal opportunity for them to have some independence from each other. If they are not ready to be separated, if possible they could be put into a larger dormitory, so that they won't dominate the group.





## PUBERTY

---

Individual children mature at different rates; puberty can start as early as eight years or as late as 18 years. Even twins of the same sex can go through puberty at different times, maybe a year apart.

The uncertainty about what will happen next, together with actual physical and hormonal changes, can put stress on each

multiple and their parents. Adolescent growth spurts can also bring unwelcome differences between multiples.

As children get older and reach puberty, privacy can become a sensitive issue, especially for boy/girl multiples and it may be the case that one child wants more privacy than the other.



My girl/girl/boy triplets started puberty at different ages. My girls reached puberty several years before their brother and even the girls were about 8 months apart in starting their periods. For a few years it felt like we had older sisters and a younger brother and then at around the age of 15 they all seemed to catch back up with each other.”

**Dad of triplets**

# INFORMATION, RESOURCES AND SUPPORT FROM TWINS TRUST

---

More information and resources can be found on our website here:

[www.twinstrust.org/let-us-help/support/resources-and-groups/resources-for-parents.html](http://www.twinstrust.org/let-us-help/support/resources-and-groups/resources-for-parents.html)

Twins Trust has support groups for parents and carers of twins, triplets and more in particular circumstances.

Details for all the groups below can be found on our website here:

[www.twinstrust.org/let-us-help/support/resources-and-groups.html](http://www.twinstrust.org/let-us-help/support/resources-and-groups.html)

- One Parent Families group
- Special Needs group
- Triplets and More group
- Grandparents group

For further reading on Joan. A Friedman and her work please visit her website:

[www.joanafriedmanphd.com](http://www.joanafriedmanphd.com)

**Twins trust.**  
**Twinline**

Need to talk?

We're here to listen

**0800 138 0509**

## **FREE HELPLINE**

Monday - Friday 10am to 1pm and 7pm to 10pm  
or email [asktwinline@twinstrust.org](mailto:asktwinline@twinstrust.org)

**For parents or carers and anyone expecting  
twins, triplets or more**

FAMILY LIFE WITH  
**OLDER TWINS,  
TRIPLETS OR MORE**

**Twins  
trust.**



[www.twinstrust.org](http://www.twinstrust.org)



**01252 332344**



**@twinstrust**

Twins Trust, Manor House, Church Hill, Aldershot, Hants, GU12 4JU

Registered Charity Numbers: 1076478 and SC041055. Registered Company Number: 3688825