

Information for Same-Sex Parents of Twins, Triplets or More

Becoming a parent is a time of excitement and joy, often accompanied by feelings of worry and uncertainty. Discovering that you are to be a parent to twins, triplets or more may magnify these feelings. It is also possible that being a parent in a same-sex relationship may make the challenge seem isolating and overwhelming. Whether you are the birth parent, second parent, adoptive parent or step parent, **Twins Trust** is here to help support you and your partner raise your twins, triplets or more.

Twins Trust carried out a survey of same-sex parents of multiples. We asked what the most useful piece of advice was that they were given during pregnancy. A huge 50% of respondents said that they had received no useful advice at all! This is one reason why this factsheet was created, in the hope of getting valuable help and advice from same-sex parents to share with other same-sex parents who may need it.

TOP TIPS FOR SAME-SEX PARENTS OF MULTIPLES

Tip 1 - We are the same as other parents. A parent of multiples is a parent of multiples, regardless of what other identities and variations in family dynamic, you may or may not, share with others.

Many of the parents we spoke to reiterated this as a top tip to remember. They then placed their focus on the same struggles and needs for support, experienced by all parents of multiples.

“I don't think there's anything specific advice-wise to cope that I need more than a heterosexual couple.”

“Why would a tip need to be any different for a same sex couple? They are a family just like anyone else.”

When you register on the **Twins Trust website** you can download for free a great booklet packed full of really practical and useful information. The booklet is called **Practical Preparing for Parenthood**.

You can also attend one of our seminars or webinars. These are facilitated by trained volunteers who are parents of multiples themselves. As well as hearing from experienced parents and receiving lots of useful information you will also meet other parents to be who are expecting twins, triplets or more. The price of these courses starts at just **£5 per person**. We even have grandparents coming along to listen in too.

Tip 2 - Ask for help and accept support.

A multiple birth pregnancy can be very tiring both physically and mentally. Some people find it hard to ask for help, but asking for help is a sign of strength. Remember friends and family may be nervous about offering help but are keen to do what they can to support you.

A strong support network within the immediate family, extended family and friends can make a huge difference. Learning to ask for help, as well as accepting help when it's offered, was the second most useful tip from both our same-sex couples and all parents of multiples.

“Accept help if it's offered. If not, forget the housework and take rest when the babies sleep. Also, join a local twins club!”

A lack of sleep in the early days can really put a strain on relationships. Caring for newborn multiples is physically demanding on both parents but especially the birth parent who is recovering from the birth. Working together and supporting each other is key to parenting multiples especially in the early days.

Twins Trust's survey asked same-sex parents what help they had received after the birth of their multiples:

82% had help from family members in caring for their babies.

82
PERCENT

39
PERCENT

39% had help caring for their babies from friends.

36% had help from friends with housework.

36
PERCENT

(Parents could choose more than one answer)

For more information on babies and sleep check out the [Twins Trust website](#). There you will find video clips from Professor Helen Ball on babies sleeping habits as well as sleep fact sheets that also can be downloaded for free.

“When we're both tired molehills can be made into mountains and arguments easily started. Our top tip is try to remember it's just the tiredness talking.”

“Work as a team. Make sure you have some couple time.”

Tip 3 - Find a routine that works for you and your babies. Establishing a routine once your babies arrive can really help to reduce the feelings of overwhelm and being overloaded. Discuss and decide upon the roles and responsibilities of each parent before the arrival of the babies if you can. Try to make sure both parents are as involved as they would like to be.

“Share maternity leave so the non-birth parent gets sole responsibility for a while. It totally boosts their confidence that the birth mum gains through experience. Leads to a much better balanced relationship - unlike most hetro parents.”

For some parents this routine may be established during time in the special care baby unit, as many twins and triplets arrive early. For others it starts once you are home. In the very early days that routine can be as simple as going with the flow of feeding, changing, cuddling, and sleeping.

Remember that all families are different so what works for one family, might not be what works for yours. In fact what works for one of your own babies, may not work for the other(s).

“Advice I had from a friend with triplets was especially useful for practicalities. He told me to make time for them individually from a young age. This advice has always stayed with me.”

Tip 4 - Be open honest and proud of your family. In addition to the usual challenges facing multiple birth families, same-sex parents may have some unique challenges that heterosexual parents do not have to consider.

These concerns range from worries over public reactions and prejudice, to whether non-birthing parent(s) will be treated appropriately by healthcare staff. The parents we asked had some very positive experiences to share with you:

“Throughout my entire pregnancy and treatment my wife was always treated with respect and just as important as me. She was always consulted in appointments, we didn't come across any hostility or homophobia.”

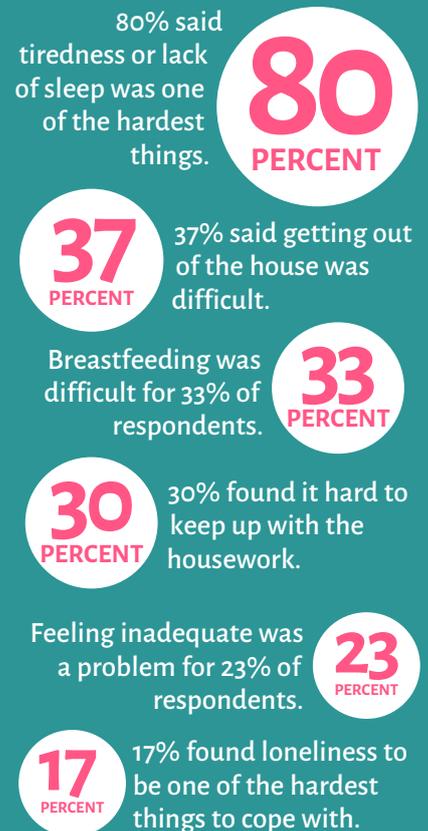
“Don't worry what anyone else thinks. Be open and honest with your family situation with your children from day one. Our daughter is so proud of her two mummies and her nursery friends want two mummies too!!”

Society continues to be fascinated by twins, triplets and more and many parents have found that as soon as you leave the house with that double pushchair (or more), it is as if the general public are magnetised to you!

It can be hard to avoid it and may at times feel unwelcome, but most of our families find that they do enjoy sharing the joy of their multiples with others! Attitudes in the UK are changing in a positive manner. The top tip offered by over 26% of same-sex couples in our survey was to be open, honest and proud of your family.



Twins Trust's survey of same-sex parents asked what they found hardest to cope with:



(Parents could choose more than one answer)

Tip 5 - Anticipate unhelpful comments and questions.

When you are out and about with twins, triplets and more it is not uncommon to be asked questions such as whether the babies were conceived naturally, whether you gave birth vaginally or by c-section, and whether your twins are identical or not.

There are a variety of unique questions often faced by same-sex parents specifically. When you are out and about holding one baby each, the question 'are they twins?' is nearly always followed by 'who is the mother (or father)?'

Like 80% of our respondents to our same-sex parents' survey, it is common for same-sex parents to conceive with the help of fertility treatment. Same sex parents might also face further questioning about the use of donor eggs, sperm or surrogacy and even the

involvement of the donor in the children's future.

Whilst your curious audience probably means no harm, it may help you to feel more comfortable and in control, to have prepared answers ready and decide how much you are happy to disclose. Remember you don't have to answer peoples' questions if you don't wish to.

“ Be prepared for many intrusive and inappropriate questions from random strangers!”

“ Your privacy goes out of the window with multiples, so be prepared to get asked lots of personal questions!”

The survey asked same-sex parents if they had received fertility treatment:

80% said they had received fertility treatment.

80
PERCENT

20
PERCENT

20% had not received fertility treatment.

Tip 6 - Stay calm and stay positive.

Going through a multiple birth pregnancy and raising twins, triplets or more is an incredible experience.

Sometimes it will be challenging especially when you are sleep deprived, when staying calm and positive can be even more of a challenge. Lack of sleep can make it hard to focus and concentrate and it can make you clumsy, prone to mood swings and also forgetful.

It's important to remember the early days of feeding every 2-3 hours do pass and looking for the little positives each day such as 'I fed both babies', or 'they were loved' and 'they are dressed' is invaluable in helping you cope with the

demands of twins, triplets or more. As some of our same-sex parents summarise nicely:

“ Enjoy yourselves and don't worry! Being a parent to multiples is hard but amazing and so rewarding.”

“ ...hard work some days... but they are fantastic and it never ceases to amaze me what a miracle they are.”



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS AND USEFUL WEB LINKS

FAQ 1 - Just how hard is it going to be?

Looking after two or more newborn babies can be mentally challenging and physically tiring, but it's also very rewarding. The first few weeks and months when babies feed and sleep in 3-4 hour cycles can be particularly challenging.

Getting support and help from family and friends can help ease the strain. 80% of same-sex parents who replied to our survey said that tiredness and lack of sleep was one of the hardest things to cope with. They coped by sleeping when their babies slept, getting naps whenever they could and not being afraid to ask for help.

Twins Trust has a sleep expectations pre-recorded webinar which is essential watching. We also have a [factsheet on safe sleeping](#).

In some areas across the UK, the charity [Home Start](#) can provide volunteers to help. The level of help can vary across the country so be sure to contact them to see what is available. Your local Children and Families Centre, local churches and community baby and toddler groups can also be great sources for support.

Remember that you can also call [Twinline](#) on 0800 138 0509. Twinline is Twins Trust's free telephone helpline open every day, 365 days a year from 10am to 1pm and 7pm to 10pm.

Whether you are calling about concerns during your pregnancy, when you are feeling a little overwhelmed in the early days or when you are coping with the challenges of

the toddler years or teenage years Twinline's trained volunteers are there to listen and support you. All are mums of twins or triplets themselves.

FAQ 2 - What breastfeeding support is available to me?

Over 30% of respondents thought breastfeeding was one of the hardest aspects to cope with. Despite the fact that breastfeeding isn't always easy, it was encouraging to see that a massive 88% of respondents offered some breast milk, be it exclusively breastfed or as part of mixed feeding.

When same-sex parents were asked what they wish they had known before birth, they said:

“ I wish I'd known how hard breastfeeding is and how long it takes.”

“ Knowing about Twins Trust's breastfeeding support probably would have helped.”

Twins Trust offers help and support for breastfeeding multiples, in the form of information, courses, and peer supporters. Twins Trust breastfeeding peer supporters are available by emailing breastfeedingsupport@twinstrust.org

Twins Trust run courses on breastfeeding which you can access whilst you are pregnant. There is also an online webinar which you can access from the comfort of your own home.

Visit the breastfeeding support section on our website for more details.

Same-sex parents were asked how they fed their babies:

52
PERCENT

52% used mixed feeding - some breastfeeding and some formula feeding.

21% fed breast milk only, some of which was expressed and some on-the-breast.

20
PERCENT

12
PERCENT

12% breastfed on-the-breast only.

Only 12% bottle-fed exclusively.

12
PERCENT

FAQ 3 - How might my pregnancy differ from that of a singleton pregnancy?

A multiple pregnancy is classed as more high risk than a single pregnancy so you can expect to attend more hospital appointments than your friends expecting one baby. There are guidelines from the NHS called [NICE Guidelines for Multiple Pregnancy](#) that can explain more and also our [Healthy Multiple Pregnancy Guide](#).

It is a good idea to consider attending special twin or triplet antenatal courses if they are available in your area. Not all hospitals run special antenatal courses for multiple birth families, but [Twins Trust](#) run a variety of courses right across the UK including for both first and second time parents. There are also private one-to-one antenatal sessions available too. All [Twins Trust](#) group courses have a number of places for families in financial difficulty so be sure to ask if this applies to you.



FAQ 4 - Will my children be affected by having two mums or two dads?

As your children get older you can help them to know what to say when asked questions about their two mums or two dads.

Many same-sex parents worry that the child may get teased at school and they worry how, when and what to explain to their children. It seems to be the old saying 'prevention is better than a cure', and that if your family is open and proud from the start, then your children will learn intuitively that they too should be open and proud.

Here are a few tips from some of our survey respondents:

“ Teach your children to have a comeback if teased, ours have been taught to say, ‘two mums, yes aren't we lucky!’ ”

“ Our daughter is so proud of her two mummies and her nursery friends want two mummies too!! ”

“ Our 14 year old has always been up front with having two mums so it's not been an issue for him at school.”



LINKS TO OTHER SUPPORTIVE CHARITIES

Family Lives

A national family support charity providing help and support in all aspects of family life, including those parenting within a same-sex relationship.

www.familylives.org.uk

Pink Parents

A resource offering information about a range of gay and bisexual parenting issues.

www.pinkparents.org.uk

Stonewall

A national UK charity working towards achieving equality and justice for lesbians, gay men, bisexual and transexual people. This includes all issues around parenting.

www.stonewall.org.uk

Other interesting findings from our survey:

- ▶ 40% of our survey respondents do not just have their multiple birth children but older or younger siblings too.
- ▶ 80% of respondents had fertility treatment to have their multiples with 78% using sperm donors.
- ▶ 74% of our survey respondents attended ante-natal classes.
- ▶ 71% of respondents had received financial help from friends or family before the birth.
- ▶ 39% said a family member went with them to ante-natal classes.

On the next page two same-sex couples share the experiences they've had bringing up their twins.

TWO SAME-SEX COUPLES SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES OF BRINGING UP TWINS

“ I have always wanted children, and falling in love with another woman was, if I am honest, not in my life plan. But we fell in love and a few years into our relationship planned to have a family.

I feel really strongly that like accepting gay people and gay marriages, gay families need to be seen as 'normal'. The times I have found this most difficult have been generally with the NHS. My GP at the time of wanting to start a family didn't know how the system worked for gay people, was embarrassed, didn't find out properly and ended up delaying our treatment by months.

Sometimes healthcare professionals were not aware that we were a couple. For example, recently when attending an ear nose and throat specialist for one of the twins the consultant said 'I hadn't needed to bring half the street along'. This was because myself and our twins' other mummy, plus both twins, had attended the hearing appointment. I had thought seeing the difference between them was important at the appointment and we both wanted to hear how they could help his sleep apnoea which was quite frightening at the time! Needless to say she was embarrassed when I explained and I am not sure her assessor was too impressed!

Other times I feel we are seen as special, and both the boys' nursery and new preschool are totally doting on our little monkeys.

I know they are great children and although our family is different we aren't doing a bad job of bringing them up.

We will have challenges ahead but we just have to face them. The more others ask the easier explaining our situation becomes, but it does take

practice - and I know we have a part to play in making it 'normal'.

Katie and Lucy from Cumbria - Mum and Mam to Robin and Alex, aged four.



“ Our experience as same-sex parents is probably the same as any other parent, although, I think the experience of each same-sex couple really depends on where they live and how open the mentality is around them.

We live in Northern Ireland and, so far, we have not encountered any issues because of our family. But that is not to say that those negative attitudes and discrimination are not there. Also, because our children are still so young, we haven't yet had to think about some of the issues that will probably occur once they are in school etc - although we hope at this stage that attitudes will be more inclusive of new emerging non-conventional families.

Most children from same sex parents are very much planned. We thought about having a family for so long and wanted a family desperately. It's not easy going through the ups and downs of fertility treatment. Therefore, we don't take anything for granted!

Parenting multiples is very different, so be prepared to have to quickly learn and multitask. Nothing prepares you for the intensity, especially if they are your first experience. As a couple we found it important to understand that each child is different but that each child also needs just as much attention. Sometimes one child demands more attention which can sometimes make

you lose focus on the other one. Be aware of this. We found that it takes twice the amount of time to leave the house, and having a good support system for us as a family was really helpful.

Our twins are now 17 months old and we are learning everyday about parenting. What I can say is that I am a twin myself and know what it feels like to grow up being a twin. If one twin starts to lean towards a certain activity or sport, encourage them but don't forget the other twin may also be interested just not at the same time. Always go back and reintroduce things to each one even if at the time they may not seem interested, they may not even realise yet that they like something.

And as a twin myself please don't compare your twins as it can create unhealthy competition and make one twin feel inadequate.

Lisa and Michelle - Mummies to Oren and Oshra.



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