

## SCHOOL POLICY FOR TWINS AND HIGHER MULTIPLES

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### Introduction

There has been a significant increase in the number of twins and higher multiples so that in many countries including the UK one child in thirty-three is now a multiple. It is therefore not unusual for schools to have several sets of twins and even triplets or more.

This increase in multiples may result for some of these reasons: mothers delaying having their families (older women tend to release more than one egg), improved neo-natal care (multiples are frequently born prematurely), and fertility treatments.

Firstly, being a multiple is NOT a disability. The following are some of the advantages of being a multiple:

- a unique and special relationship that is not available to singletons;
- an understanding about sharing and waiting for adult attention right from the start;
- having a companion and friend available particularly when tackling homework and revision for exams;
- having a competitor who can spur his or her sibling (s) to do better.

Twins and higher multiples are not like brothers and sisters born closely together. This policy is designed to help educators understand multiples and to be able to meet their additional needs.

### Early Development and Zygosity

Multiples are formed when two or more eggs are fertilised (di-zygotic) or when an embryo splits (monozygotic).

Knowing whether you are identical or not, is frequently very important to parents and to the children themselves as it is an important aspect of their identity. Also some diseases are hereditary – therefore if one identical twin has a disease it is highly likely that the other one will also have the disease.

There is a much higher risk of damage (complications) to multiple birth babies as a result of problems before and/or during birth. Compared with singletons, the risk of perinatal death in twins is several times greater as is that of cerebral palsy. There are also greater risks of prematurity and intrauterine growth retardation leading to the babies being small (low birth weight or abbreviated development) for gestational age and physical damage. On average, twins are born four weeks before singletons and one kilo (2.2 lbs) lighter, with correspondingly more serious issues for higher multiples.

***Monozygotic/MZ Twins (Identical)***

Monozygotic twins are formed when the embryo splits. The babies are of the same sex and have the same genetic make-up. The later the embryo splits, the more danger there is of physical damage to one or both of the babies.

Early division results in two sacs and two placentas frequently leading to misdiagnosis of these twins as non-identical because of the old myth that "two placentas means non-identical". Later division of the embryo leads to a shared sac and placenta. Very late division of the embryo, results in conjoined or "Siamese" twins.

Sometimes the shared blood supply of identical twins leads to the twin-twin transfusion syndrome where one receives most of the nutrition and is engorged whilst the other is pale and sometimes 500g or more smaller. Twin-twin transfusion syndrome can mean that identical twins seem less alike than non-identical twins.

Although monozygotic twins are often described as "identical", differences in biology and environment means that there can be considerable differences between them including their fingerprints and footprints.

### ***Di-zygotic/DZ Twins (Non-Identical)***

Dizygotic twins are produced when two individual eggs are fertilised by two different sperm. These twins are no more alike than brothers or sisters. They may be same sex boy twins, same sex girl twins or boy/girl twins.

The placentas of DZ twins may fuse together with the result that many have been incorrectly diagnosed as MZ (identical) twins. Unlike MZ twins, the release and fertilization of two eggs can vary with maternal age, with assisted reproduction and with ethnicity, DZ twins being more common in mothers of African ancestry and less common in ones from Asia.

### ***Higher Multiples (33 weeks gestation is normal for triplets)***

Triplets and higher multiples may result when individual eggs are fertilised by individual sperm, as in the case of DZ twins, or when the embryo splits as in the case of MZ twins. The risk of physical disability is greatly increased with the number of babies present

## **Intellectual Development**

On average, multiple birth children score lower than singletons on IQ tests and tests of language ability. Modest differences between multiple birth children and singletons in mathematics and early reading have also been found in The Performance Indicators In Primary Schools (PIPS) tests, devised by Professor Peter Tymms from the University of Durham in the UK.

These lower scores have been attributed to the unique environment of multiple birth children where they receive fewer individual interactions and re-enforce each others' immature speech. At the extreme, this 'special twin language' is referred to as cryptophasia or idiologlossia.

Each child needs to be assessed as an individual so that if required an individual education plan can be devised and learning support provided which may include the services of a speech and language therapist. If both children have special needs the support should not be halved as though they were one.

Research by Professor David Hay indicates that there may be a greater tendency for multiple birth children (especially boys) to have higher incidences of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Such children may be impulsive and have difficulty concentrating and staying on task.

Care must be taken when assessing the behaviour of young children as they are naturally lively and curious and assessments need to take into consideration child development and learning through play. Routines, clear rules and self-organisation strategies such as “plan, do and review” often help children to focus on the learning required. Children may also find it helpful to picture a dial to control their behaviour. For example, ten may be very active, 5 may be just right for learning, one may be just right for sleep. Adjusting the dial helps the child to adapt his/her own behaviour to the particular context – the football field is different from the library!

### **Personal, Social and Emotional Development**

Multiple birth children do not develop personally, socially and emotionally in the same way as singletons. There is always their co-multiple(s) present for direct comparison and competition. Although siblings are compared, and rival each other trying to establish dominance, the relationship is frequently more intense for multiples.

#### ***Comparison***

It is part of human nature to make comparisons and although siblings may be compared by parents, friends, teachers and others, for multiple birth children direct comparisons can be made from birth without the “excuse” that one of the children is considerably younger or older. Interactions with parents and within families regarding competition and comparisons often establish patterns that later on may be problematic.

If one multiple birth child is always compared to the detriment of the other, he or she may lose self-esteem and opt out. The children themselves may become over concerned with comparing themselves, looking for differences to indicate that one is better than the other.

Both adults and children need to consider the positive aspects of each child. This may be difficult if one child always seems to achieve more. If one receives an award and the other doesn't, it can be hard to reward one whilst consoling the other. However, if the children are placed in context with their peers, a bigger picture may help to understand that comparison is not just with one's co-multiple(s).

Teachers need to emphasise the uniqueness of each child. When speaking about a twin or higher multiple to other staff or to parents, this child needs

to be discussed relative to the peer group and not just to the other multiple(s) siblings. Parent/Teacher consultations need to be arranged so that each child is discussed separately. The time allocated for each multiple needs to be the same as for singletons in the peer group. Consideration may also have to be given as to how the children operate as multiples e.g they may be highly competitive at home.

### ***Competition and Rivalry***

For multiple birth children rivalry may be more intense than with singletons. The children may become highly competitive; having a heightened sense of what is fair, frequently demanding exactly the same. Even if multiple birth children are in the same class at school, they can not always be treated the same. Teachers may not always fully understand if one twin becomes upset if they perceive the other to be having a better deal. If one comes “first” and the other “second” in the class or school, then one is inevitably considered less able by the others. Multiples may need help to understand that life is not fair and that they can not always be treated in the same way or have the same. Teachers and parents can help by praising each child for their achievements and helping multiple birth children to be pleased when their co-multiple has success.

### ***Dominance***

Dominance may take the following forms:

- neither child dominates;
- one always dominates;
- the children alternate dominance;
- dominance varies according to the situation or activity.

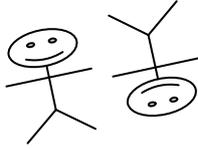
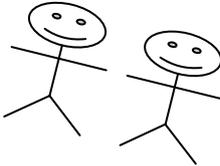
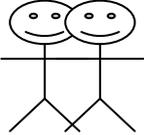
Although one child may dominate in the home situation, this may not be the case particularly when the children start school. Observation of the children, particularly in a play situation, may help to determine which child, if any, is dominant, the nature of the dominance and whether this appears to be adversely affecting their learning. Where one child is always dominant, even speaking for the other, the dependent child may find it difficult to function effectively in school. However, when separated it may be the dominant child who loses confidence and the dependent child who blossoms and gains in confidence. If one child is always dominant, try arranging play sessions with children where the children do not have their co-multiple(s) present. Playing with younger children may help the dependent child to assume a leadership role. Playing with older children may help the dominant child to take orders.

### **Individuality and Self Image**

Central to personal, social and emotional development is an awareness and understanding of self, with the development of a positive self- image. By school age children place themselves in categories such as age, size and gender, referring to qualities and characteristics as well as to appearance. However, for multiple birth children, there is the additional category of

“twin”, “triplet” or more. Their concept of self and their development as an individual, is inextricably linked with how far they and others perceive them to be a unit. Some multiple birth children are so dependent on each other that they are unable to function as individuals. The nature of the multiple birth relationship may be so close that the death of a multiple is particularly painful for the surviving twin.

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”	“Mature Dependents”	Closely Coupled”
 <p data-bbox="236 1010 555 1375">Multiple birth children who find their relationship with each other restrictive to such a degree that they may fight, deny their multiple birth relationship sometimes polarizing to opposite extremes in order to establish their own identities.</p>	 <p data-bbox="587 1014 1070 1137">These are multiple birth children who enjoy their relationship with each other functioning effectively both as multiples and as individuals.</p> <p data-bbox="587 1171 1034 1294">They are able to pursue their own interests and friendships without resenting or over-competing with their co-multiple(s).</p> <p data-bbox="587 1328 1046 1505">If they happen to have the same interest or talents as their co-multiple(s) they still pursue that course aware that being an individual sometimes means doing the same as your co-multiple(s).</p>	 <p data-bbox="1093 1014 1433 1447">Multiple birth children who act as though they are a couple or unit and are mostly treated by other people as one unit. The children may respond to both names interchangeably and be unable to recognise their own mirror image. They have few or no friends outside of their twinship and may combine to be a powerful unit.</p>

The model may be used to assess how multiple birth children operate as multiples and as individuals. In the following assessment sheet, the characteristics displayed by each child are recorded by ticking the box next to each descriptor. A box is ticked on the horizontal line every time an indicator is identified. Ticking the horizontal line enables the complexities of the multiple birth relationship to begin to appear.

Children may fall broadly into one of the three types or they may swing from being intense individuals to being closely coupled or they may display characteristics of all three. The children within the multiple sets may vary,

for example, one child may be “Closely Coupled” whilst the other is a “Mature Dependent”.

Life experiences and comparison underpin the model as these constantly apply.



## **Separation In School**

Putting multiple birth children into separate classes requires careful consideration and consultation with parents. Most multiple birth children have little experience of separation prior to starting school and may be upset if they have to cope with a dual separation from parents and their co-multiple(s).

Many schools have policies (written and unwritten) declaring that multiples should be separated in order to help them to develop as individuals or should be kept together as multiples are a natural unit. Some schools have rigid organisational policies that fail to take into account the needs of multiples e.g. classes are arranged in alphabetical order or birthdate so multiples have to be kept together. There is no right or wrong answer with regard to separation in school; each decision should be related to the needs and type of relationship the siblings share / experience.

Before deciding whether to separate multiple birth children, parents and professionals should meet to discuss the pre-school development and experiences of the children. The questionnaire in the Preschool section of the education website ([www.twinsandmultiples.org](http://www.twinsandmultiples.org)) provides a useful framework for assessing the children both as individuals and as multiples, prompting discussion about how best to support the learning of the children.

The needs of each child must be considered both as an individual and as a multiple. No decision should be irreversible – flexibility is the key word both for parents and teachers.

### ***Reasons to Keep Multiples Together in School***

- Only one classroom is available.
- Multiple birth children may need the support of each other particularly if they have not experienced separation prior to school or are experiencing a major upheaval such as death, divorce, new sibling etc. Even if the children are comfortable when separated, they may need to be able to check up on what the other is doing
- Very different teaching styles by teachers in the same year group. Even if the teaching styles are similar the children may be compared more at home particularly if one appears to be making more progress e.g. gets a reading book first.
- The multiples do NOT want to be separated. Forced separation in the first year of school along with all the other firsts can actually reinforce dependence on each other. Opportunities to work independently in the same classroom may be a much better option.
- The siblings have shown no problems in previous pre-school settings where they shared a classroom and had a positive and productive school experience with peers.

## **Reasons to Separate Multiples in School**

- The multiples want to be separated.
- One child is markedly more able academically and or socially than the other.
- One is a constant distraction to the other.
- One child perceives himself or herself as failing.
- One 'mothers' or over protects the other (more often with boy/girl pairs).
- There is markedly similar progress with one child leveling up or down so that they can keep together.
- There is disruptive behaviour where multiples form a "fatal combination"; the multiples use their identity to cheat or play tricks.
- One or both children are dependent: unable to mix or relate with other children; their constant 'togetherness' is hindering the development of their social skills.
- There is intense competitiveness so that the child's main goal is to keep up with or beat their co-multiple(s).
- One or both children polarise (go to opposite extremes).
- There is lack of privacy where one multiple birth child constantly reports to parents about the activities and progress of the other.
- A division of labour exists that interferes with their learning and socialization.

The placement of multiples should be reviewed annually. Parents and teachers need to discuss how they will support the children before reversing a decision too quickly. The outcome may not be what is expected e.g. when a twin pair is separated because one child is very dominant. In such a case, the dominant child often loses confidence as s/he has lost her main purpose whilst the other child flourishes.

## **Strategies for Teachers of Multiples**

- Encourage multiples to sit apart for different class activities. This assists in identifying who's who and discourages them from completing each other's work or over-relying on each other.
- Look for differences in the multiples, not sameness, e.g. voice differences, left/right handed, birthmarks, hair growth. Being able to address each multiple by his or her individual name, assists teachers, peers and friends in recognising that they are individuals.
- Refer to each child by his or her own name. This helps to identify each child, develops individuality and sets a good example for their peers to also address them individually.
- Expect differences in test scores, neatness, behaviour but don't be surprised if they are very similar especially if the children are identical; if one is markedly behind the other investigate the reasons (don't rule out a learning disability in one of the multiples).
- Avoid insensitive comparisons, e.g. "You are smarter than your twin." This sets up both multiples to have poor self-esteem. Instead, get to know each child's preferences, interests, or hobbies. This may be as

simple as knowing each child's favourite colours, types of books, games, or subjects...etc.

### Flexible School Policy ✓

Considering the needs of multiple birth children is an important part of ensuring that 'Every Child Matters'. The successful school ensures that it also sits at the centre of the model:

Extreme Individualising Schools	Flexible Schools ✓	Closely Coupling Schools
<p>Multiple birth children are always separated as it is believed that this will help the children to develop as individuals.</p> <p>Schools may not:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• acknowledge the multiple relationship and the possible need for the children to be near each other or to be able to check out what the other is doing;</li> <li>• take into account that one child may be affected by the other e.g. by being extremely competitive or by opting out;</li> <li>• support the children personally, socially and emotionally in order to develop as individuals.</li> </ul>	<p>The school is aware of the potential needs of multiple birth children and their families.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents and children's views with regard to separation are taken into consideration.</li> <li>• The children are assessed to consider whether separation is appropriate when they start school.</li> <li>• Arrangements can be changed according to the needs of the children.</li> <li>• The multiple birth relationship is acknowledged and celebrated as well as enabling children to develop as individuals.</li> <li>• The children are recognised and called by name.</li> <li>• Individual achievements are recognised and celebrated.</li> <li>• Parental consultations are arranged for each child. Each child is compared against the peer group or against typical developmental benchmarks.</li> <li>• The children are comfortable selecting the same or similar subjects/activities understanding that being an individual may mean doing the same</li> </ul>	<p>Multiple birth children are always kept together as it is believed that they are a natural unit.</p> <p>Schools may not:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• recognise individuals;</li> <li>• call individuals by name;</li> <li>• assess the children separately;</li> <li>• report on their progress separately;</li> <li>• recognise individual problems and issues;</li> <li>• provide for multiple birth children as individuals e.g. when one has a special need.</li> </ul>

Although some smaller schools do not have the option of separating multiple birth children into separate classes, they are still able to meet the needs of

multiples if they set out to do so. Children may be given opportunities to develop independence in separate groups and a positive staff attitude will ensure that the children are called by name and encouraged to develop both as multiples and as individuals.

Rather than simply considering whether schools have enough classes for separation, parents are advised to visit prospective schools in order to consider whether the school staff have experience of and understand the needs of multiple birth children and are prepared to be flexible in order to meet their needs. A school with more than one class in each year group may be less able to meet the needs of multiples than a school with single form entry that does understand the needs of multiples.

### **Nursery and School Admission**

When entering nursery/kindergarten or school, multiple birth children may need special consideration. They should not be labeled as taking up more than one place. They may particularly need a pre-school place as they may have had little or no opportunity to socialise with other children, and to make friends on an individual basis.

Recent legislation in the UK acknowledges that multiple birth children should have special consideration with regard to school admissions:

*“Families must be at the heart of the admissions system and the Government expects the admission authorities for primary schools to take the needs of parents with young children into account in deciding which oversubscription criteria will be used. The admission authorities for primary schools **should** ensure in their oversubscription criteria that siblings (including twins, triplets or children from other multiple births) can attend the same primary school, as long as they comply with the Education (Infant Class Sizes) (England) Regulations 1998.”*

### ***Delayed School Entry***

Many multiple birth children are born prematurely. Even when there are no actual disabilities resulting from prematurity and low birth weight, the real date of birth may be extremely important. Premature children may be forced into the school year above their “correct” year if they are born two or three months early, as can happen with multiples. This may result in the children being assessed as behind their peers, when in reality they are being compared with an older age group. When assessing premature children, it may be helpful to compare them with the year group below, to see if their development and performance is more in line with this year group. Parents and educators may consider applying for delayed school entry, or for additional time in the early years setting in order to allow such children further time to develop.

A more difficult situation arises if one multiple is significantly delayed compared with the peer group. The question arises, "Should the other(s) start school or be advanced whilst one stays behind?" Professional assessment is required in order to decide upon appropriate intervention, which may or may not include delaying school entry.

Tamba strongly advocates that multiple birth children should not be separated as a result of admissions policies and should be given priority for admission.

With understanding and support where necessary, multiple birth children can make good progress in school, developing as individuals whilst enjoying and celebrating their multiple and other relationships.

For more information please look at the 'Meeting the Educational Needs of Multiple Birth Children' on our website:

<http://www.twinsandmultiples.org/training/tme.cfm>