

Multiples in School: Parent Tips

Two of the concerns of raising multiple-birth children is whether or not they should be together in the same class or separated and which type of placement would benefit each child's personal development. In some schools, there may be enough classes of the same grade to facilitate each child being in separate classes. However, it is not unusual for some schools or school boards to have a policy that all multiples must be separated, or to automatically assume that multiples would be together. In order to assist you in making the decision that would be right for your children, the following offers some considerations for both having the children together and for separating them.

Pros to Separation

Although there is no substantial evidence to support the policy that multiples must be placed in separate classrooms in order for them to grow and develop as individuals, there are sometimes some circumstances which would indicate that separation is advisable. Here are some examples for when separation may be in the best interests of each child:

- constant "togetherness" is hindering the development of social skills in one, both or more;
- a "division of labour" exists;
- insensitive comparisons by teachers, peers or even each other have led to feelings of inadequacy in one or more of the multiples;
- the multiples form a "power unit" which is causing disruptive behaviour;
- the kids use their multipleship to exploit, cheat or play tricks;
- one or more of the multiples appears to resent the lack of privacy resulting from sharing a classroom;
- one multiple proves to be a constant distraction to the other;
- in opposite-sex multiples, the female is overprotective or "mothering" of the male co-multiple;
- in skill-grouped classrooms where the abilities of one multiple are far above those of his co-multiple; and
- the multiples WANT to separate.

Wise parents and educators will realize that some of the above issues may be evident in one year and not the next. Evaluations/observations of multiples' behaviour and development need to be regularly monitored.

Cons to Separation

Sometimes there are valid reasons for keeping multiples together:

- major emotional upheavals may have occurred within the family, eg. death, divorce, moving house, etc;
- only one classroom is available;
- unequal education due to two different teachers employing different methods of teaching;
- multiples are at or near the same skill level in a skill-based classroom.

Recommendations regarding classroom placement:

1. It is not recommended to separate multiples who want to be together. Forced separation can damage self-esteem, inhibit language development and delay learning.
2. It is not recommended to automatically separate multiples in their first year of school. Such a separation adds to the stress of starting school, and may actually increase the multiples' need to be together.
3. All multiples need as much independence as they are ready to handle. Multiples flourish when allowed to separate on their own timetable. Whether they are in the same classroom or not can and should be evaluated each year. As the multiples grow older, they themselves will also have input as to whether or not they should or want to be together.
4. Encourage multiples to choose separate classes as they gain confidence in the school situation.
5. Decisions as to whether or not the children should be together needs to be made by a "team" approach - the parents, the teachers and the principal. Educators need to realize that parents know their children best, and it is important, for an easy transition to school and

the development of the children, that parental opinion be considered.

6. If multiples are in the same classroom, they can be in separate settings within the class.
7. Especially if your children look alike, make it easy on the teachers and students and dress them differently so that they are easily recognized and seen as individuals.
8. Parent/teacher interviews need to reflect how each child is doing as compared to the other children in the classroom, rather than in comparison to each other.
9. You may need to indicate you would like a separate parent/teacher interview for each child. Sometimes teachers expect one interview to talk about all the multiples together, and that can be confusing and perhaps not fair to the children since it is more natural in that environment for comparisons to be about the children in relation to each other rather than to their peer group.
10. Multiple Births Canada strongly recommends that placement in classes of each set of multiples is evaluated on a case-by-case basis, that placement evaluation occurs on an annual basis, and that parents, teachers, principals and the children be included in the decision-making.

Pat Preedy (UK) provides this important note for parents: "The critical thing is developing 'mature dependence' which starts as soon as the children are born. For multiples who are mature dependents, it actually doesn't matter whether they are together or apart – they function as individuals and enjoy being a multiple."

Compiled and adapted by Lynda P. Haddon, 2002, 2009.

Reviewed by Pat Preedy Ph.D., M.Ed., B.Ed. (UK), John Mascazine Ph.D. (US) and Donna Launslager, MBC Health & Education Chair.

Sources

Multiples in School, booklet by Multiple Births Canada, Revised 1999
Placement of Multiple Birth Children in School, A Guide for Educators, National Organization of Mothers of Twins Clubs, Inc., 1991

Additional Resources

Websites:

twinsandmultiples.org, Educational Website for Multiples in School
 twinservices.org article, "School Placement: Apart or Together?", Pat Malmstrom

Books:

Parenting School-Age Twins and Multiples, Christina Baglivi Tinglof, 2007.
Twin and Triplet Psychology: A Professional Guide to Working with Multiples, Audrey C. Sandbank, 1999.
Understanding Multiple Birth Children and How They Learn, John Mascazine Ph.D. (US), Pat Preedy Ph.D., M.Ed., B.Ed. (UK) and Professor David Hay (Australia)
The Joy of Twins, Pamela Patrick Novotny, 1988
Twins, Triplets and More, Elizabeth M. Bryan, 1992
The Art of Parenting Twins, Patricia Maxwell Malmstrom and Janet Poland, 1999

Questions?

Call: (705) 429-0901 or (866)228-8824 (toll free)

To order copies, call or write:

Multiple Births Canada
 Box 432 Wasaga Beach, Ontario, Canada L9Z 1A4
 office@multiplebirthscanada.org

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