

Raising More Than One Baby at a Time

Raising twins or triplets can be both fun and tiring. With "fraternal" births, it's like raising 2 or 3 very different people who share the same birthday. With "identical" births, the children look the same but have different personalities, likes and dislikes. In either case, it is important to treat them as the individuals they are and not as one. It takes lots of organization to raise more than one at a time.

Treating as Individuals:

Children need time together but they also need to be separated, because each one is a different person. Choose different sounding names. Try not to dress the children alike, even as babies. Identify identical twins with nail polish or bracelets. When they are old enough to dress and undress (3 to 4 years), they may sometimes choose to dress alike. You might want to put them in separate rooms for sleeping, so if one cries he won't wake up the other one. The rooms don't have to be bedrooms. Spend time alone with each child and take each one out separately sometimes. Give each one lots of cuddling and hugging time. Praise each one and discipline each one alone. Give toys according to what each child likes.

Feeding:

Although you want to treat each child individually, nursing mothers may find it easier to feed two babies at the same time when one is hungry. If bottle feeding, try to find another adult to help you so all the babies get held for feedings. Trade off each time, so you hold a different child for each feeding. Don't prop bottles. When you begin solid foods, use separate bowls and spoons. This will help you know how much each child is eating.

Growth and Development:

Most twins develop at the same rate as other children their age, unless they were premature. Then it may take a year or two to catch up. With fraternal twins, you may see lots of difference, as with any 2 kids the same age. If the twins are a boy and a girl, the girl often will be taller and have better motor skills until late school age. To prevent language delays, it is good to spend time talking to each twin. Preschool programs are very helpful in learning language, motor, and social skills.

Discipline:

Discipline each child separately and at different times. Don't punish both for what one did. However, address each issue individually. There may be times when both children are involved and need to be disciplined the same way. Biting is a common problem, so set rules like "no biting," and give the child a "time-out" if he bites.

Illnesses:

Don't be surprised, when one child catches something like a cold, flu or chickenpox, the others will catch it also. So, you don't need to keep the kids apart. It is always a good idea for general health concerns to use separate cups and other eating utensils. If one child is sick, don't keep the others home from school.

Sibling Rivalry:

People give multiple birth children lots of attention. Brothers and sisters can feel left out. To lessen bad feelings between siblings, be sure to praise your other children to people. Sometimes take one child with a brother or sister and leave the others at home. This will help them separate from each other and bond with brother or sister. Twins compete with each other about everything from birth, especially for your attention. Let them know you have plenty of love for both.

Toilet Training:

Twins often toilet train at a later age. Don't begin until they let you know they are ready – at least 2 or 2 1/2 years old for girls, and older for boys. Don't compare children. They may be ready at different times. A relaxed approach is important.

School:

If possible, twins should be put in separate classes. They mature at their own rate and learn at their own speed. In separate classes they can learn things on their own and have their own friends. Try not to compare your children.

Stress:

Caring for two or more babies can be very stressful. You have more to do and may be more tired. Ask for help from parents, friends, relatives, and visiting nurses. If you feel that you are losing your temper too much and are afraid that you may hurt your child, immediately call your child's doctor. Take care of yourself. Get a break from the children when possible to relax and rejuvenate. Do adult things and keep contact with your friends.

Other Resources:

- Greater Kansas City Mother of Twins Club (GKCMOTC)
- TWINS Magazine
- National Organization of Mothers of Twins Clubs (NOMOTC)