

DEALING WITH DIFFERENCES

Although they share the same birth date, multiples are usually very different with respect to their abilities and personalities. They may achieve milestones such as crawling, walking, and talking at a totally different rate especially if they are fraternal. It's also not uncommon for one child to be potty trained and ready for pre-school ahead of their sibling. Since multiples are constantly compared, it may be tempting to focus on these differences. Parents of multiples need to recognize that each child develops at his or her own individual rate. As long as children reach milestones within the normal range, parents should not be concerned if there is significant variation in their development.

Even identical multiples may have completely opposite personalities. Research has shown that multiples raised together have a tendency to complement each other's personality traits. One multiple may attempt to make up for a characteristic that their sibling lacks. For example, they may be more organized in an effort to compensate for their sibling's messiness. It's also typical for multiples to flip-flop personality traits throughout their lives. This tendency to switch characteristics can keep parents on their toes.

In some relationships, one multiple may assume a dominant role while their sibling behaves more passively. This could cause a problem if one child begins to make all of the decisions and becomes overbearing. Parents may need to separate their multiples in school so that the more passive child can gain confidence in social situations without leaning on their sibling. Placing children in separate classrooms might be necessary if they have very different needs and seem to be in the shadow of their relationship when together.

Parents may find it trying to deal with their multiples' differences since they can often cause conflict. Siblings that have very different personalities may fight more often than those with similar traits. These disagreements are actually healthy since they learn to resolve conflicts and develop social skills at an early age. Multiples that are very different also might have less of a problem forming separate identities outside of their relationship. They may even try to accentuate their differences in order to better define themselves.

It's also common for multiples to have different learning styles especially if they are not the same sex. Girls typically have better verbal skills whereas boys usually perform well in math. Parents will need to recognize that each child has their own strengths and weaknesses. However, problems may arise if one multiple clearly advances ahead of his or her sibling in several areas. The multiple that lags behind in ability may feel frustrated since they are constantly being compared with their smarter sibling. School officials may suggest that this child repeat a grade so that they can learn at their own speed and hopefully absorb more of the material. However, parents should consider holding back a child only as a last resort. Recent studies have shown that students who flunk a grade have more behavioral problems and get lower test scores when compared to kids at the same achievement level that were not held back. Providing one-on-one tutoring for the multiple that has learning problems may be a better solution.

Differences in intellectual abilities among multiples is even more pronounced in situations where one sibling has a disability. It may be very frustrating for the child with a disability to watch his or her sibling take off in areas that they continuously struggle with. Parents will need to provide extra support by encouraging the disabled child to achieve milestones at their own pace. Acknowledging even the smallest accomplishments will help boost the child's self-confidence. Parents can also foster a sense of belonging for each of their multiples by facilitating play and interactions in the family. Activities should be planned that the children can enjoy together regardless of their developmental stage.

Multiples are often viewed as a unit but can be as different as siblings that are not the same age. Parents will need to recognize that each child has unique characteristics and interests regardless if they were born as a singleton or multiple. Their children may have totally opposite personalities

and develop at varying rates. Despite these differences, multiples still share a special bond and will most likely be best buddies for life.

Sources:

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