

SERIES III: BOY/GIRL TWINS

Unlike same sex twins, boy/girl twins are rarely mistaken for being their sibling and their twinship may not always be obvious to strangers. The challenge faced by most parents of opposite sex twins is dealing with their different developmental levels rather than individuality issues.

Male and female twin pairs typically develop at varying rates. Girls usually mature first and may be ahead of their brothers in speech, fine motor skills, and toilet training. Having a slight edge over their brothers in these areas can boost their self esteem, causing a reversal in traditional sex roles with the girl often being the dominant one or "the boss". Some boys may feel threatened by their sister's faster maturity rate and their attempt to mother them. However, boys usually begin to assert themselves more when they begin school and obtain their own set of friends.

Once boy/girl twins enter kindergarten or first grade, they may begin to prefer same-sex friendships. This transition can lead to conflict if one twin is more ready than their co-twin to develop outside relationships. If this is the case, parents will need to gently explain that each twin has a right to play with their own set of friends in order to avoid hurt feelings. Assuring that each twin has separate activities to choose from may help minimize their dependence on each other. It's also common for one twin to feel the need for more privacy ahead of their co-twin. Parents should try to honor their children's request for privacy which may involve providing each twin with more of their own space. The majority of boy/girl twins usually have separate bedrooms by the age of six.

Boy/girl twins have the advantage of obtaining firsthand knowledge about the opposite sex from their sibling. According to the Twinship Sourcebook, "...having an opposite-gender twin can demystify the opposite sex and furnish a good foundation for each twin's sense of his or her own sexual identity." Parents can use toddler bathing times to name body parts correctly and talk about male/female differences. In addition, boy/girl twins are often more at ease with friends of the opposite sex compared to children who have not been exposed to opposite sex playmates.

Researchers have found some interesting characteristics associated with boy/girl twins when studying them for sex-related differences in behavior and intellectual abilities. Traditionally, females have been thought to possess superior language skills whereas males are expected to excel in areas of spatial and mathematical ability. However, boy/girl twins do not seem to conform to this stereotype, showing less sex typical behavior. Research conducted by the University of Chicago indicated that males from opposite-sex twin pairs displayed superior speech ability when compared to other male twins and also exhibited less aggressive behavior. Another study determined that females from opposite sex twin pairs showed superior spatial skills relative to females from same-sex pairs. Therefore, boy/girl twins seem to have an influence on each other's ability to develop certain skills.

It's apparent that boy/girl twins complement each other and derive many benefits from their relationship. They are able to learn from each other both socially and intellectually. For parents of opposite-sex twins, it must be a wonderful experience to "have one of each".

Sources:

1. Collier, Herbert L., Ph.D. The Psychology of Twins. Englewood, CO. The Business World Inc., 1996.
2. Lewis, Georgia "Boys, Girls and Math" Twins Magazine Nov./Dec., 1996, pages 30-32.
3. Noble, Elizabeth. Having Twins. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1991.
4. The Twin Sourcebook, Copyright Twins Magazine, Revised, 1997.

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