

## THE IDENTITY ISSUE

Parents of multiples may be concerned that their children will have difficulty developing individual identities, especially if they look alike. After all, there have been accounts in the media of adult twins who live together and are unable to lead separate lives. Luckily, this type of relationship among multiples is rare. According to the most recent behavioral research, multiples are as capable of forming separate identities as singletons.

In reality, multiples may actually have an advantage over single born children in forming their own identities. Multiples always have a basis for comparison, and sibling competition may lead to differentiation. Even though parents view fighting as a nuisance, healthy competition can help multiples define who they are. They also have a greater opportunity than singletons to practice social skills since arguing can often turn into problem solving and collaboration.

Multiples may have a stronger tendency to adopt different roles when they are brought up together in order to stress their individuality. Research indicates that twins reared apart are sometimes more similar than those raised together. Therefore, sharing an environment can help identity development since each multiple strives to carve out their niche in the family unit.

Despite these facts, parents of multiples may still wonder what they can do to ensure their children develop healthy self images. Listed below are recommendations for promoting individuality according to a variety of sources:

- Provide multiples with distinctly different names.
- Give each child their own toy in order to help them understand the concept of ownership and sharing.
- Encourage family members to refer to each child by their name instead of "the twins" or "the triplets."
- Take children on separate outings so they can have time alone with each parent.
- Don't label children with personality traits since it's unfair to be categorized.
- Make a point of taking pictures of each child alone as well as together.
- On birthdays, give each child their own cake and sing happy birthday separately.
- Provide older multiples with their own clothing drawers.

Some may also argue that parents should not dress multiples in the same outfits since it could negatively impact their sense of identity. However, most experts agree that no real problems are associated with dressing multiples alike when they are very young. According to Adam Matheny, Ph.D., Director of the Louisville Twin Study, "It's not that big a deal unless twins get to an age when they reject the idea of dressing alike, but the parents are pushing it." He believes parents should back off and let their children decide what to wear.

Most parents of multiples will agree that once they get to know each child, it is almost impossible to treat them as anything other than individuals. Multiples are no different than single born children who also struggle to develop their sense of self in the family environment. As long as parents are sensitive to their multiple's needs, they can enhance their children's individuality and set the stage for healthy identity development.

### Sources:

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