

The Magazine for Multiples Since 1984

TWINS™

**Special
Back-2-School
Section**

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**Where Have All
My Friendships
Gone?**

**Make the
Most of Your
Pediatric
Appointments**

**TWIN
DISCRIMINATION**

**An Old Problem
with a New Label.**

**The
MYTHS of
Motherhood**

August/September 2012



Columns:

Mom-2-Mom _____ 8

Mama Ibeji (Mother of Twins) by Patricia Dreyfus

Raising Twins through Each Age & Stage



Pregnant with Twins—
11 Tips on Preparing Your Singleton for Multiples _____ 10



Infant Twins—
Twinfant Tips _____ 12



Toddler Twins—
Make the Most of Your Twins' Pediatric Appointments by Judy Gyde _____ 14



Preschool Twins—
School Days by Joann Amoroso _____ 16

Tales from Twins _____ 21

Big Ben by Jacqueline Davidson Kopito and Amy Davidson Lombardo

A Word from Dad _____ 28

MY Kids Will NEVER Do That...by Bill McGee

LOL: Laugh out Loud _____ 35

Down with a Sickness by Meredith Bland



Feature Articles:

Where Have All My Friendships Gone?
by Kitty Just _____ 6

SPECIAL BACK-2-SCHOOL SECTION

Kindergarten Here We Come...5 Ways to Help Your Multiples Have a Great School Year by Laura Sky Brown _____ 18

Navigating the School System _____ 19

School Bus Safety Tips for the New School Year & 5 Quick Back to School Breakfast Ideas _____ 20

Twin Discrimination an Old Problem with a New Label by Lauren Kramer _____ 22

The MYTHS of Motherhood by Carol B. Cowley, M.S.N. _____ 24

Choosing a Daycare for Twins by Steven Jeffries _____ 26

Navigating: the Teen Years with Boy/Girl Twins by Elizabeth Montanya _____ 30

In Every Issue:

A Note from the Editor _____ 3

Mailbox/Letters/New _____ 4

Double Takes _____ 32

Product Preview Section _____ 34

All the latest & greatest products for parents & kids!



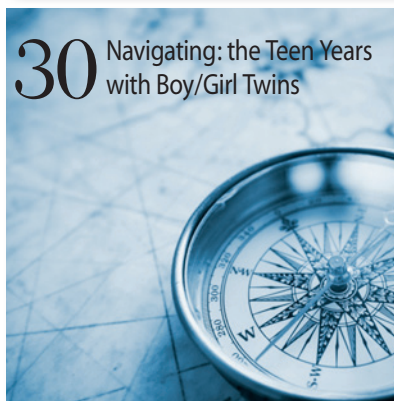
10 11 Tips on Preparing Your Singleton for Multiples



16 School Days



21 Big Ben



30 Navigating: the Teen Years with Boy/Girl Twins

On the Cover:

Meet 6-year-old identical twins Meela and Morgen. They love to play outside, ride bikes and enjoy coloring and writing, too. They just started full-day Kindergarten and are in the same class together at school.

Fall is in the air and this is the time of year where, if your twins are pre-school or school-age, they are off to their schools and settling into their new classroom routines. If you're in the thick of raising infants or toddlers, it may be hard to fathom that you will someday be sending your set off on the school bus; but before you know it your days of diaper duty will be over and soon your life will be filled with soccer games, scouts, gymnastics, dance, PTA meetings and back-to-school nights! For me, we hit a major milestone this fall... our fraternal twin boys have started high school and are now in 9th grade! I swear it just seems like yesterday they were in 3rd grade and now they are both taller than me... so please understand that time does fly by so fast and each age and stage you experience with your twins is special and unique. Your life will be filled with new and different joys and challenges at every step and life will get easier, then harder, then easier, then harder and that never changes when raising twins.

So, one of the most challenging decisions we as parents of twins struggle with is whether to keep our twins together in a classroom or to separate them at a certain age. Parents of identical and fraternal twins have to face this tough issue. Most experts say that you should base your decision on what is best for each individual child and not necessarily what feels best for the parents. Often, parents are more concerned in keeping the bond strong within the 'twinship' and they fear if their twins are separated from one another they will lose that special bond. Other parents experience a strong need to separate their twins if they experience too much competition or if one twin tends to take charge and do everything for the other.

There is a lot to consider when making the decision to keep them together or to separate them but ultimately it should be based on the needs and development of each individual set. There are things you can do as a parent to help your twins have a successful school year and you can read more about this topic inside this issue. I was recently at a back-to-school night at my youngest son's Kindergarten class and met a mother of 5-year-old identical twin girls who are together in class. I asked her if their pre-school teacher had a hard time telling them apart. Her answer broke my heart. She told me that she believed that their teacher still did not know her girls as individuals and could still not tell them apart after teaching them for an entire school year.

Her girls deserve to be known individually by not only their teachers but also their peers.

What can parents do to help? Because people tend to automatically see twins as a "set" it makes it more difficult for them to see them as separate, different individuals. Dressing them differently certainly can help others tell them

apart. Also, try talking to the teacher and ask if they can play a game every morning where the class needs to come up with one different trait or quality about each twin to distinguish them from one another. This truly forces people to look past the fact that they are identical and teaches them to look at each child individually. Soon, you will see that after people make an effort to truly get to know each child as an individual, both peers and teachers will never get them confused again and your twins will no longer feel frustrated that nobody can tell them apart. It takes extra effort but in the end, it will be a win-win for everyone! Because my twin boys are fraternal and don't look much alike at all, we didn't experience this problem but we always had to convince people that they were indeed twins! If your twins are identical, it may be worth trying something like this in your multiples classroom.



Sincerely,
Christa Reed
Christa Reed, Editor-in-Chief

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Dear Twins Editor:

I was hoping to get some information. I'm the mother of 37 year old fraternal boy/girl twins...Both are still not married because they are constantly hanging out together ... How about an article about parenting adult twins?

Via Email

Sharon

Sharonklov@aol.com_

(mailto:Sharonklov@aol.com)

Editor's Note: Thank you for your email. This is very interesting! We have done some research and looked through our 28 year archives and don't believe TWINS Magazine has ever done a story about this particular topic in adults. I can imagine it would be difficult for your twins to meet other people and fall in love if the perception was that they were a 'couple' because they are always together. As parents, we all want our multiples to grow to be separate, unique, independent individuals who are capable of forming close, intimate relationships with others. We know that children don't go to bed one night and then suddenly wake up the next morning and become separate, independent adults! Separation is a learned behavior. Becoming a separate, independent individual is a normal process which begins at birth and continues throughout a person's life. It usually reaches its height during two phases of a child's development...first being around 6-months of age, and lasts up to 3-years of age. The next phase covers adolescence. Both phases are distinguished by a unique, push/pull process. One part of them burns with inner drive to be off on their own, to become separate and independent. The other part fears that separation and welcomes the comfort and safety of their twinship bond. They want to strike out on their own but when they encounter unexpected hurdles, or feel insecure or frightened, they return back to the safety of each other for refueling. For some twins, separation can be very difficult and each goes through the process at their own rate; and some at

different points in their life. Keep encouraging them to set out on their own and find activities and friends separate of one another. Becoming a separate individual is not easy for some twins but we need to stress the end result—an individual with a positive sense of self, gradually increasing independence and their ability to engage in meaningful relationships with others—well worth it in the end!

Dear Twins Editor:

My name is Teresa Heinnickel. My family is from Greensburg, Pa. We have five children. The oldest is Courtney, age 15; then Hannah age 6; Quinn age 5; and our twin girls Abby and Avery, age 4. I just thought I would send a picture of them and just let your audience know that life with twins can be challenging at times, but just remember, someday they will get on the bus and go to school for eight (8) count them eight (8) wonderful hours!!! I will never forget the day we found out we were having twins.

I had gone in for an ultrasound December 21 2007 because they wanted to get an actual due date. You see I was still breast feeding my 7-month old at the time and they thought I was around 10 weeks but they wanted to be sure. My husband is a veterinarian and was kicked by a horse in October and broke his leg so he was on the mend so was able to go

with me to the hospital since he was not working at the time (hence the reason I got pregnant in the first place because he was off work lol.)

Anyway a nurse came into the room and placed the ultrasound probe on my stomach and jumped up and said "I'll be right back" I began to worry that something could be wrong when my husband (the vet who has given many ultrasound sounds to animals) chimed in and said, "Uh she left because well I think I saw two on the screen." I of course said, "Shut up liar!" Then my fears were confirmed when in walked another nurse and said "Hi I'm here to ultrasound your twins." I do not remember this but my husband said I looked like a scene from the exorcist as I sat straight up and said "You're kidding me?" Then the fear began as to how I would be able to handle four kids under the age of two! I did have thankfully a good pregnancy and I was not sick and did not need to go on bed rest. I felt fine considering I was very large and chasing after a two-year-old and an almost one year old. Then on June 21, 2008, I woke up and my water broke. My husband took me to the hospital where via C-section (six weeks early) I gave birth to what I thought were supposed to be fraternal twins. Abby weighed 5lbs.1oz. and Avery weighed 5lbs.5oz and both were healthy. We all went home to-



gether and as time went by it became more difficult to tell them apart. They cried at the same time (which was all the time) they even slept at the same time and spit up the same, it was strange to me because we were told they were Fraternal as they did not share the same sack or placenta. Avery developed a red raised birthmark on the top of her head that we used as identification until she turned one and it disappeared. Now we can tell them apart but, most everyone else cannot. They just turned four and they are the last two children I have at home. Next year they will go to Kindergarten so I just wanted to share my story and let other mothers know that there is light at the end of the tunnel. Just take it one day at a time or one hour at a time... whatever it takes to get through each day because time flies and before you know it they will be ready for school.

Via email,
Teresa Heinnickel

Dear Twins Editor:

I just had to share this photo of my two-year-old twin boys practicing their future sneak out route!

Via email:
Jenn Sayre



Dear Twins Editor:

Hi, my name is Carolyn Liggett. My identical twin girls have been featured in your "Double Takes" photo section as well as your twins magazine calendar in the past. I just recently had a second set of identical twin boys (with no fertility help conceiving both sets naturally!) I'm sure you know, that is VERY rare and unheard of!! I am attaching a photo we just

took of the four of them together. Thanks so much for including them in the magazine!

Via email,
Carolyn Liggett

Dear Twins Editor:

Hi- My two and a half year old twins and I ran into another friend with her two year old twins at the grocery store this past weekend. I posted this picture with the caption-

"Hey Ladies, do you come here often"? We got TONS of responses on Facebook. Many people said I should submit this for a cover or photograph in a magazine. Thought it was so cute. They just happened to be color-coordinated too... What do you think?

Via email,
Michelle Ward



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Where Have All My FRIENDSHIPS

Gone?

by Kitty Just

Calling old friends! Calling old friends! Come out...Come out, wherever you are! As the mother of two singletons and 1-year-old twin boys, I created this slight "fun" variation on an old children's game to make a serious point. You see, I am often home alone with my twins, and fun is a word that I recently had to look up in the dictionary to recall its meaning.

I know just by writing this that I am bordering on self-pity (not to be confused with remorse) over the fact that raising four young children can be tough. But is that why my old friends are rather invisible these days? I often ask myself. Are they afraid that my condition is contagious?

To put it bluntly, I'd like to know where all my friends have gone. I seem to remember them from the not-too-distant past whooping with joy when hearing about my impending multiple birth. They were the same ones who daily called to get the "twin pregnancy update" and who promised to be that extra pair of hands when the babies arrived.

So, there I was, egotistical old me, feeling very special and flattered by all the attention. I could not wait to deliver my babies—the only twins, by the way, ever born in the whole world! Finally my boys entered the world amid much "ooohhing" and "aaaah-ing" from friends near and far. They visited; they left; and they didn't come back... so much for feeling special.

Excuses! Do I get excuses! Some of the most popular ones are: "I'll try to come by!" "I'm so busy!" "You don't need visitors!" "I don't want to bother you!"

Please bother me, I think when hearing those comments. I want to be bothered! Yes, my hands are full; my home is crazy; and someone is crying or hungry or wet, but I still need my friends to bother me. Now more than ever, I need the security that friendships give!

Maybe it's a fear I have that I will never return to my pre-babies state of mind. Granted, my life has changed, but I haven't, I hope and I wonder how my friends perceive me? Their absence is disturbing, if not depressing.

If I thought the fault lay with me, I would readily admit it. But in talking to other mothers of multiples, I find the same trend. It distresses them as much as it does me. For some reason, our old friends consider us off limits now that our families have grown.

I realize that most people fail to understand how I cope with my topsy-turvy life. 24-hours a day of doing double diaper changes, juggling two bottles in two hungry mouths and attending to stereophonic screaming (not to mention the voices of my other children who would also appreciate some of their mother's attention) is a tough schedule for an outsider to grasp.

I don't lightly dismiss the fact that many of my friends have similar days with their children. I'm not trying to outdo them on the misery index, but I have come to believe that nobody can appreciate what two babies the exact same age, running in opposite directions, can do for one's psyche, unless they have experienced raising multiples.

Had I delivered a single baby, I would probably be a lot more mobile, running to the mall or lurching with a pal, baby in tow. But I cannot do that comfortably. The hassle and exhaustion of getting two babies revved up for a fun day spent strapped in a stroller and dressed in parkas when naps and meals have to be considered can be a monumental, if not impossible challenge for me to meet. Quite honestly, I don't really know if I can blame some of my friends who have older children for their excusing themselves from joining me on those excursions. I'd like to stay home, too!

So I stay home often, nursing my wounds, hoping for an impromptu visit or telephone call from a buddy who just wants to get together for old times' sake. I love my kids, but I love my friends, too. It seems that "never the twain shall meet!"

I think that I know what the real problem might be: My friends are all afraid that I am going to put them to work chasing babies! Never mind that they volunteered to be that extra pair of hands anytime I needed them. In fact, I know just the thing that might wake them up. If they need an invitation, so be it:

Mrs. Kitty Just requests the honor of your presence for coffee, some sympathy and general chit-chat any day of the week including evenings. Expect several interruptions, but diaper changes unnecessary.

Regrets Only (Running Shoes Optional)! ♥

Kitty Just has twin boys and was an active member of her local parents of multiples club for many years including serving as president.

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by Patricia Dreyfus

MAMA IBEJI (Mother of Twins)

As I step from the plane in Lagos, Nigeria, I hear the music of Africa, high and tinkling, beating and throbbing like my pulse. I smell Africa, pungent, lush, and earthy, a scent of fecundity and life.

The heat engulfs me like a steam bath. Colors swirl as men in embroidered

caftans, green, gold, turquoise stride past me. There are no signs to follow, no red or green lines to customs, no cubicles with agents for tourists or citizens, no airline personnel to assist me. Everyone is talking and moving in the same direction.

The heat in the corridor and the sweat of my fellow travelers are suffocating. I am wearing a long sleeved t-shirt and long pants because I am terrified of the malaria carrying mosquitoes that are the only other life form swarming in this chamber. We spill into a large room. Rifle toting soldiers surround the perimeter. They use their guns to motion which way to go and to keep us moving. I try to stay as far away from them as possible and I keep moving.

On the plane here from London, I sat next to a young American who works in Lagos. We talked of the difficulties of living in Nigeria. Corruption is rampant and even though illegal, "dash," bribes, are openly solicited. He mentioned that he had twin girls, both redheads. He said that his wife is treated with great respect in Nigeria because she is the mother of twins and that the girls are a talisman for people. Everyone wants to touch them for luck.

I also have twin girls, and I know about the Yoruba Tribe's belief that if you have twins you are blessed. The blessing includes riches, which are yet to come to me, and great power. The mother (Mama) of twins (Ibeji) can curse or bless whichever she chooses. I have always favored this philosophy and tell the story tongue-in-cheek whenever I want to impress or intimidate someone. After our conversation, I blithely wrote on my

landing card, in the space for Occupation: "Mama Ibeji."

Now, drowning in this sea of people, I am beginning to panic. It's true, I have twins, but in Nigeria with an uncertain political system and this formidable man as the representative of the regime, my cleverness has put me on shaky ground.

Like the wreckage I have so quickly become, I am washed up on the beach in front of the Passport Control tower. It is too late to change my blunder. With a whimper that I pray he doesn't hear, I slide my passport toward the man in charge.

A quick assessment by those cappuccino eyes and he opens my passport. The look he gives me is dismissive. I am weak from the humidity and heat and the tide of humanity that is heaving behind me. I want out of here. I push the passport back again. A quick flick of his finger, a glance, and this time he just abandons it in the mass of booklets in front of him.

Then I notice the currency stuck discretely in the other passport folders. I have compounded my error. I tentatively reach for my papers. As the tips of my fingers touch the book, he slides it to him and opens it again. This time he is looking intently at my Landing Card. I am not breathing. I retrieve my quivering hand and stand frozen like a small rodent looking up at the hawk.

Mr. Control's eyes narrow. He is staring at the line that says, "Occupation." He raises his right eyebrow, straightens up to his full height, adjusts his cap, picks up his stamp and endorses my passport page with a great thud. He slowly folds it and looking into my eyes, hands it to me. "Welcome to Nigeria, Mrs. Dreyfus," he smiles, "And how are your twins?" ♥

Patricia Dreyfus received her BA degree at the University of California and has been published in the LA Times, Travelers' Tales, the Best Travel Writing, and She Writes, Anthology. She has raised five perfect children and both she and her sister is Mama Ibeji's.

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11 Tips for Preparing Your Singleton

for the Birth of Your Multiples

- 1** Take your singleton with you when you shop for the twins and let him or her pick out a gift for the babies.
- 2** Get out your singleton's baby pictures and show her what she looked like. Tell your singleton stories about him or her when she first came home from the hospital.
- 3** Use dolls to act out "coming home from the hospital," the first days at home and how to touch and play with twin babies.
- 4** Let your singleton pick out some toys he or she would like to give to the twins.
- 5** When you pack your bag for the hospital, pack a bag of activities for your singleton. Include crayons, paper, scissors, glue, snacks, a new toy, a disposable camera and a children's book on bringing home multiples, etc.
- 6** If at all possible, make arrangements for your singleton to be cared for at home by a close relative, such as a grandmother or an aunt while you are in the hospital.
- 7** Prepare your singleton for your visit to the hospital; be sure to say good-bye if at all possible and call every day from the hospital.
- 8** Buy and wrap a gift from each twin for your singleton.
- 9** If your older child comes to the hospital to visit, try not to hold the twins during the visit.
- 10** When you come home from the hospital let someone else bring the newborns in; greet your older child and spend some time alone with him or her.
- 11** Praise positive behavior and encourage your singleton to talk about how they feel.

Kangaroo Care

Newborn kangaroos stay inside mom's pouch, snugly against their mothers' bodies until ready to be out on their own. Similarly, kangaroo care is when a newborn baby is placed on the parent's bare chest, wearing only a diaper and held for a length of time.

Some hospital NICUs allow parents of preemies to carry out kangaroo care 24/7 because of how beneficial it is to babies' health and survival.

A blanket may be placed over the baby's back, or the infant may be buttoned up in the parent's shirt. The contact enables the baby to hear the parent's heartbeat and breathing, exactly the same as a fetus would hear inside the womb.

Initially begun by a doctor in South America in the 1970s when incubators were in short supply, kangaroo care is now used regularly in many of today's NICUs. Studies have shown it to have very positive effects, particularly with preemies. The skin-to-skin contact provides physical and emotional benefits for both parent and child. It can:

- Help babies maintain body temperature
- Regulate baby's breathing and heart rates
- Increase baby to sleep more deeply and for longer periods
- Promote breastfeeding success
- Nurture the parent/child bond
- Enable baby to be discharged from the hospital sooner



For more information on kangaroo care, visit www.marchofdimes.com and www.lalecheleague.org

TOP 10 MOST POPULAR ITEMS ANY NEW MOM OF MULTIPLES NEEDS

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INFANT

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6:00 feeding-4oz
6:30 diaper-wet

Parents of twins never think they will confuse one twin with the other. But, in the middle of the night or during high-stress periods when everyone is demanding to be fed at once, it can happen. Sometimes dad is feeding, then mom tends to the other baby. Maybe there's medication involved. Certainly who did what and who was changed when is important information to have. A quick glance at the twin's list can be a life-saver. A dry-erase board in the kitchen or the nursery is a must for families with multiples. As parents or caregivers feed, change or give medications to infants, the activity is noted. The next person to interact with the babies knows just what has been done by reading the entry on the board. Maintain a list for each child. Categories should include:

- Time of feeding
- Amount consumed
- Time of diaper change
- Soiled or wet
- Time and length of nap
- Time medication given

Be sure to start each day fresh. Enter the date at the top, erase yesterday's entries and begin again. Using the board will eliminate the guesswork when one of your babies, or more likely both, cries out for attention. ♥

Weaning Awareness

When weaning babies from the breast, it is generally a gradual slow process rather than an abrupt stop. Multiples may wean individually or as a group. "There is no natural rule specifying that complete weaning must occur by a designated age," explains Karen Kerkhoff Gromada, author of the newly revised book, *Mothering Multiples* (La Leche League International) "Baby-led weaning" occurs when the mother is breastfeeding based on her babies' individual cues and works best for fraternal or those siblings who have different temperaments and needs. "The mother doesn't offer breastfeeding as a distraction, or a way to quiet the baby or toddler, but she doesn't refuse the child when he indicates the need to breastfeed," Karen emphasizes. "Mother-guided, babies-led weaning" takes place when the mother "begins to set flexible limits on certain aspects of breastfeeding one at a time, only at home, in a quiet room and/or in a certain position such as lying down. "Partial weaning" may be initiated by a mother who wants "to decrease the number of feedings while meeting the needs of her babies or toddlers to some extent," Karen says. Some approaches used in mother-guided, babies-led weaning can be used, as well as limiting the duration of the feeding by slowly counting to 20. Mom can limit the number of feedings to the one or two per day that appear to be most important to children. ♥



TWIN TIP

When one of your twins is on a different formula, put a rubber band around the bottle that contains that formula. During night feedings or times when you are particularly tired or stressed, you won't grab the wrong bottle. My smaller twin son had to have iron and vitamins added to his formula. I always put a rubber band around his bottle. That way my husband and I knew which bottle was for Joey. This worked when our twins were very small. For safety reasons you wouldn't want to chance it with an older baby who could remove the rubber-band.

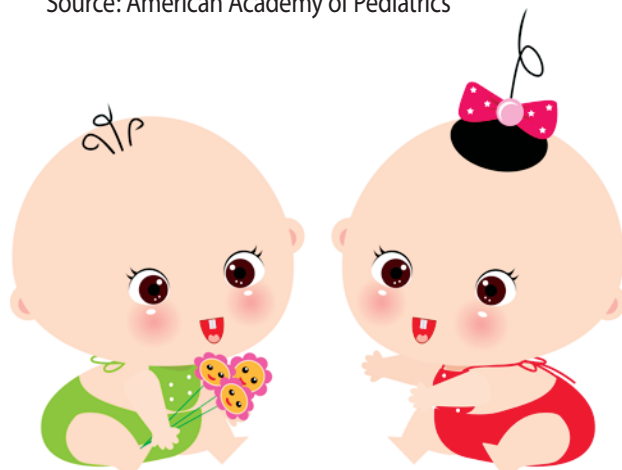
--Lisa Guerrero, Yuma, Arizona

The Eyes have it!

At about 1-month of age your twins will display these visual abilities:

- Can focus on objects eight to 12 inches away
- Eyes will wander and sometimes cross
- Shows a preference for black-and-white or designs in strongly contrasting colors
- Exhibits partiality to human faces over objects ♥

Source: American Academy of Pediatrics



TEETHING TIMES TWO!

If you have identical multiples, expect that teething will occur around the same time. Mirror image identical twins will probably get their first teeth on opposite sides of their mouths. Fraternal twins' first teeth may come in months apart. Most babies' initial teeth arrive anywhere between 3 and 18 months of age. Your pediatrician should check your babies' mouths as a part of their well-baby visits. Ease sore gums by rubbing them with your finger or giving babies a teething ring. Use a pain reliever like Infant's Tylenol drops to reduce any mild fever that may occur as a result of teething. ♥



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Make the Most of Your Twins' Pediatric Appointments

By Judy Gyde

Judy Gyde lives in Toledo, Ohio and is a former pediatric nurse who has twin nieces and a son-in-law with a twin sister. The pediatrician she worked for had about five sets of twins per month who visited the practice for routine checkups.

When Kim brought her twin-toddlers to the pediatrician's office, one child cried the whole time and the other kept asking for cookies. By the time Dr. Carter entered the room,

Kim was frazzled. Her children's distractions caused her to forget to ask a couple of important questions of the doctor.

This happens frequently. Many parents are distracted during office visits and forget to mention important details of health or behavior to their doctors. Perhaps this has happened to you. Here are some ideas to help your office visits go more smoothly:

BRING YOUR TWINS' MEDICAL HISTORIES WITH YOU

For your first visit, bring a copy of your children's medical records from your previous physician. Your new doctor is interested in their medical histories, previous surgeries, diagnoses, and treatments. Remember to bring immunization records. Have all your records in a file folder for safekeeping, and let the office make copies, but keep the originals for your home records.

BRING YOUR LIST OF SYMPTOMS

Before the appointment, make a written list of each child's symptoms and any questions you may have for the doctor. This helps you remember important information you may otherwise forget. Symptoms are like pieces of a puzzle. When you tell your doctor all of the details—even seemingly unimportant ones—it gives your physician a clearer picture of your situation. It helps make an accurate diagnosis and treatment plan.

TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR ABOUT MEDICATIONS

If your twins take any medications, vitamins or herbs, bring the bottles with you in separate zip-lock plastic bags, labeled with each child's name. Your doctor will easily see

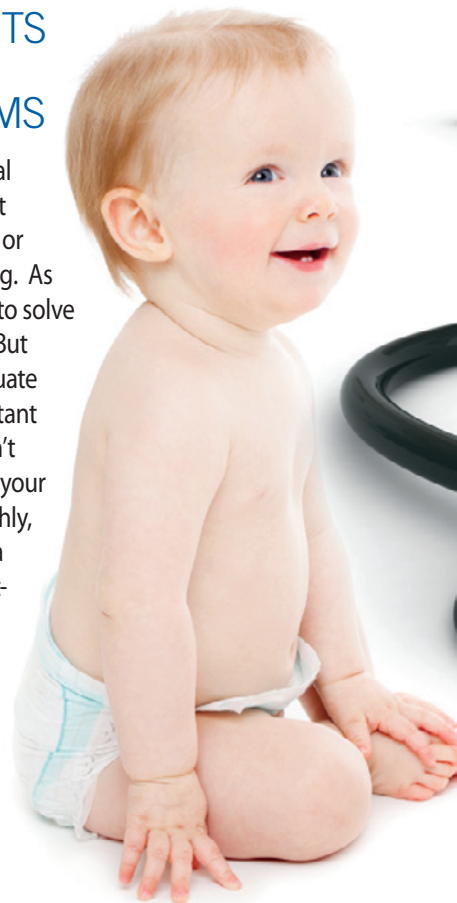
what they take, dosage and frequency. By looking at your bags of medications, your doctor can prevent misunderstandings and mistakes. It's an important safeguard.

Your doctor may want to change a medication. If the physician doesn't explain why, ask about the reason(s). Sometimes doctors are busy thinking and forget to clarify why they are making changes. Ask about side effects or anything you should be watchful of with new medications. Usually children won't experience side effects, but if they do, you'll know how to respond.

Everyone's body responds a little differently to each medication. If one of your twins is taking a new prescription and having a problem with it, call your doctor if you are concerned. Some meds need close monitoring to make sure they are working properly. If a med isn't working well, your doctor may want to switch to another one, which your child may tolerate better.

SCHEDULE APPOINTMENTS BASED ON PRIORITY ITEMS

If your child has several medical problems, select the most important one or two that need addressing. As mothers, we tend to try to solve everything in one visit. But this can result in inadequate time for the most important health issues. If there isn't enough time to address your child's problem thoroughly, a follow-up visit can be a good solution. Your doctor can make sure your child is progressing well with the new treatment and you can talk about your other concerns.



Most pediatricians and family doctors schedule or allot 10-minutes per appointment, per child. It's important to respect their time constraints. Doctors appreciate patients who focus on health issues and don't draw them into conversations about unrelated topics. Most pediatric offices will allow you to schedule your twins' appointments together.

Out of respect for your doctor, don't ask for a medical opinion related to another child's health if you don't have an appointment for that child. If your other child also is sick, it's best to schedule a separate appointment. This enables the staff to prepare each child's medical chart for the office visit and avoids confusion for the doctor.

Appointments are easy to forget, especially well-child check-ups. The children are feeling fine and moms forget the visit because doctor appointments aren't part of the normal routine. If you think you may forget, post a reminder note on the refrigerator the day before the appointment.

Doctors not only appreciate when parents remember appointments, but also when they arrive a few minutes early. Latecomers set the doctor's schedule back, sometimes for the entire day. If every person arrives early and uses the proper time allotment, everyone's waiting-room time is relatively short.

DEVELOP A TREATMENT PLAN WITH YOUR DOCTOR

Your doctor wants you to understand the treatment plan set up for your child(ren). If you don't understand something, ask



Going to the doctor.... 6 Key Tips

1. Shorten your waiting time by scheduling the first appointment of the day or immediately after the doctor's lunch break.
2. If possible, plan your appointments around your twins' nap schedules so they will feel their best.
3. Never promise your children they won't get a shot. Sometimes the unexpected happens. If they need one, tell them it will go very fast and try to distract them during the process.
4. If your office visit has been traumatic for your children, reward them with stickers or a treat.
5. After a doctor's appointment, wash your children's hands with soap and water to minimize exposure to office germs.
6. If possible, bring a dependable older child or adult to help you during the appointment.

your physician to go over it again and explain in detail what each step is for and how to carry out. No question should be overlooked if it is important to you. During your visit, if possible, write down important details that could easily be confused or forgotten.

SHARE YOUR CONCERNS

Don't be afraid to talk to your doctor about personal issues or uncomfortable topics pertaining to your twins. Your doctor treats all types of problems regularly and can help you. But your physician is not a mind-reader and can visually recognize only some aspects of your children's health, so you have to introduce the topics your physician needs to know about.

TESTS, PROCEDURES AND SPECIALISTS

Your doctor may want to order medical tests or send your child to a specialist for problems that need great attention. Certain screenings and lab work help your doctor thoroughly understand the roots or manifestations of certain conditions. Provide the nurse with the dates you are available for appointments or tests. This saves time and enables your nurse to schedule things more quickly for you.

Continued on page 29



PRESCHOOL

School DAYS

by Joann Amoroso

It is 384 hours and counting until Mary, Annie and Joseph start pre-school. They are 3-years-old and potty-trained, two major criteria for preschool. I converted those 16 days to hours because it sounds longer. After three years at home, they seemed eager for new stimulation and adventures.

I, however, was having second, third and even fourth thoughts about our own readiness. My husband Jack reassured me that the kids were prepared, it was just mom who was hesitating.

I reviewed all the notes from the meeting with the preschool director, looking for any misstep. I wanted to say "See Jack, we need

to stop, find someplace else... event if it takes us another year...or two." There were no missteps and I really had no misgivings about the preschool that we had selected. I was just not ready.

I recalled the preschool's "trial days"—one of the suggested ways to adapt everyone gradually to their new environment—when I first took the kids to preschool. During that time we were there I tried to stay inconspicuously accessible. Annie was a bit cautious but seemed to really like the whole idea of meeting new people her own size. Joseph surprised me by being "Mister Participation." He raised his hand and jumped in with both feet by the second

Joann Amoroso and her husband Jack live in Colorado and have triplets—a boy and two girls.



visit. Mary had reservations and came over regularly for a hug. She did like the chance to use glue and scissors, though.

It was reassuring that they would have each other for comfort and familiarity. I had watched in wonder as Mary relied on her sister to overcome their first feelings of uncertainty. When snack time was over, Mary dutifully headed to the garbage can with her trash. About half way there, she realized she was surrounded by children she did not know. She turned quickly and returned to her table, where she asked Annie if she was done. She was. The two of them held hands as they traversed those strange and new circumstances. I remember that moment whenever I worry about how they are doing.

Trial days are long past, but the first day I had to leave them was not easy. All



three of them cried and reached for me until I thought my heart would dissolve into a thousand little tears. No words of reassurance, not another hug or kiss, no "I love you, I will come back" could stop the flow of emotion. I walked out of the classroom, down the hall and quickly turned into the director's office. It was there that I allowed myself to feel the full jab of my agony, away from the sound and sight of my children. The director handed me a tissue, offered me a chair and went to check on them. When she returned, I already knew they had quieted down and were turning their attention to class activities. I left feeling very proud of my children. I still called four or five times that day, but the director humored me with the reassurance that my children really were OK.

They have been going to preschool for two months now. We talk about what "being good" at school means and I encourage them: "Listen to your teacher, do what she says, share, take care of one another, learn somebody's name today and have fun."

Jack recently went to a preschool potluck and spotted Annie and Mary holding hands on the playground. Joseph was on the slide, not far from his sisters. Their teacher assured us that they do watch out for one another and said she is impressed with their listening skills, ability to follow directions and willingness to share with the other children. They truly were ready.

Whenever I go to pick them up, we have a ritual greeting and reunion. They all run to me, yelling "Mommy, Mommy" and we spend as long as we like hugging and kissing hello. When we finally uncouple, Annie always says, "You came back to get us." And I always reply "Of Course I did, Annie, Mary and Joe. I always will because I love you and I love you two and I love you three. Let's go home."

I find that my heart still wants to dissolve...into a thousand tears of delight. ♥



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KINDERGARTEN

Here We Come! ⁵ Ways to Help Your Multiples Have a Great School Year

Kindergarten is such a bittersweet thing. When your children are babies, screaming their heads off in the middle of the night, you think K-day will never arrive. When they are confident, 4-year-olds reciting their ABCs, you feel certain they will be academic stars. But on the day you actually have to deliver them to their first day of school... (gulp)! It feels as though the umbilical cord is being cut for the second time. And in fact, it's true. Now your children will be making new friends and learning new things that have little to do with you.

For parents of multiples, the transition is even more complicated. Yes, your children have someone to share this milestone with, but the emotional adjustment can be more intense and the emptiness at home more obvious. Read on for five Kindergarten checkpoints that can help you and your multiples have a great school year:

- 1** Check your children for readiness. Kindergarten teachers expect children to be ready socially and behaviorally. This means they should be able to sit and listen for at least 10 minutes, take turns and share, follow simple direction and get along with other children. Teachers expect a certain level of sensory and motor ability. Can your children run, climb, jump and hop? Can they use scissors and write with a pencil? Can they sort objects into groups by color, shape and size? They expect some cognitive and language ability that allows the child to express himself or herself fluently and retell a story. Some Kindergartens offer checklists or kindergarten readiness tests. It's your job as a parent to understand your children's strengths and challenges and be ready to help them develop throughout the school year.
- 2** Check yourself for realistic expectations. My children's school has a saying printed on the kindergarten packets "Childhood should be a journey, not a race." Kindergarten is about getting used to school, learning to work together, and gaining a love for education. It's not about being the first kid to count to 100 or read a story. In fact, many experts say that too much emphasis on rote learning in Kindergarten can damage a child's interest in school. Keep

a firm focus on your own child and avoid all temptations to compare him or her with others---especially important with multiples. Labeling one child "a good reader" or "artistic" at this age can limit that child and discourage his or her sibling for life.

- 3** Help your children feel independent and confident. Confidence begins with comfort in the new environment. Take every opportunity to visit the new school ahead of time and make one or more "dry run" trips to the building. If you can, invite some future classmates over to play in the first few weeks of school. Enlist the support of first, second or third-graders you know to explain the facts of kindergarten to your children. When the big day arrives and school begins, keep your tears and fears to yourself, and communicate excitement and happiness to your children about kindergarten. Then, throughout the year, help your children feel good about what they're learning and doing, but don't go overboard in lavishing on the praise. In *Helping Your Child Start School*, Bernard Ryan, Jr., writes: "Most kindergarten teachers know how important it is to build self-esteem, but not all recognize that building curiosity and self-criticism are more important." Saying, "This is the best finger painting I've ever seen!" can actually cause children to doubt your word. Build their confidence by saying something like, "This is a really interesting picture. What colors did you mix together to make orange?"
- 4** Continue the learning curve at home. For some parents (myself included), the day your child can read "cat" or count beyond 10 tempts us to get out the flash cards and workbooks. Today, progressive kindergartens focus on readiness, not worksheets. For now, cherish the exploration part of learning and postpone the accomplishment part. Take your children for a nature walk and encourage them to ask "Why?" about dozens of things. Let them sort the laundry by color or coins by value. Help them make a pattern from different colors of jellybeans. Help them figure out what road signs say. If the class is learning about

butterflies, check out some butterfly books at the library and look at them together. These are the foundations for learning.

5 Build a positive relationship with the teacher and school. You are your children's first and most important teacher, but the kindergarten teacher is a close second. Your children are making a big transition this year, and working together with the school yields better results than seeing it as any enemy. If you have particular issues related to multiples—for example, if one of your children has a special need or if you are opposed to separating your twins—figure out a productive strategy for working with the school. Get together with the teacher or principal; be prepared with good reasons for your request and offer as much information as is necessary. This can be a touchy area, because you don't want teachers to form ideas of what your children can do before the school year even starts. Start slowly and be available throughout the year to meet with the teacher in and outside of conferences. Offer to help in the classroom or participate on field trips and special projects. Know what is going on in school. An education is not a product you purchase for your child; it's a project you are embarking on in partnership with the school. That simple attitude adjustment can make a big difference to your own and your children's happiness throughout the 12 years to come. ♥

Laura Sky Brown lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan and is a part-time editor and full-time mom at home with boy/girl twins and a younger singleton.

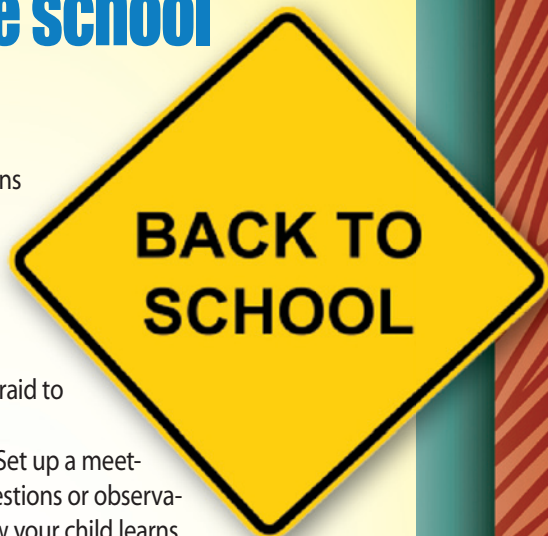
Navigating the school system

If you find one or both of your twins struggling in school, don't wait until the holiday break to make a change.

- ➔ Trust your instincts. You know your children best. If you feel something is wrong don't be afraid to take action.
- ➔ Talk to your children's teacher. Set up a meeting and be prepared. Bring questions or observations you have made about how your child learns.
- ➔ Bring a notebook and take notes at all school meetings. Keep these notes and other school papers in a file. Bring this file to all meetings concerning your child.
- ➔ Ask your children's teacher for a plan of how they will help your children.
- ➔ If you don't understand what is being discussed at a school meeting, ask questions.
- ➔ Once a plan for your children has been put in place, stay on top of the situation. Keep track of what is or is not working and report back to the school.
- ➔ Learn all you can. Talk with other parents who have been in similar situations and find out what worked for them.

SMART MOVES

- ➔ Take your twins for a school visit ahead of time, especially if this is their first year at a new school. The twins will feel more comfortable if they are somewhat familiar with the setting.
- ➔ Partner with your twins' teacher; show a spirit of cooperation. If he or she does not have much experience with multiples, you may have to help educate them. Create opportunities to share information on twins and let them know that you have literature on twins that might be helpful, if interested. Gently offer some tips to help tell them apart. Does one always wear red? Are their hair styles different? Let the teacher know that you want to be informed on any situation involving your children's adjustment to the school and learning tasks. Volunteer to help in the classroom.
- ➔ If your twins are in the same classroom, request a separate parent-teacher conference to discuss each of your children. ♥



School Bus Safety Tips for the New School Year

As schools and families across North America prepare to start the new school year, Student Transportation Inc. operations teams at Student Transportation of

America (STA) and Student Transportation of Canada (STC) are issuing back-to-school safety tips for students, parents and motorists.

SAFETY TIPS FOR STUDENTS

Be on time for your school bus and never run after or next to a bus.

If the windows are down on a hot day, keep your head and arms inside the bus.

Stay away from the Danger Zones. Areas within 10 feet to the front, back and sides of a bus are considered the most dangerous spots.

If you drop something near the bus, never bend down or crawl under the bus to get it -- ask your bus driver for help.

If you must cross the street, always do so in front of the bus. Make sure the red lights are flashing and walk in front of the crossing gate arm that extends in front of the school bus.

Pay attention. Listen and look both ways before stepping off the bus or crossing the street. Don't let sweatshirt hoods or headphones block your vision or hearing.

SAFETY TIPS FOR PARENTS

If you drop off or pick up your child at school, do not park in a bus only zone. It may cause a collision and adds unne-

cessary risk to the safety of kids walking through a danger zone area.

Check your child's clothing and backpack to make sure there are no loose drawstrings or long straps that could get caught in the handrail or bus door.

Make sure your child gets to the bus stop on time. The beginning of the school year holds a greater risk of students rushing to make their bus, since many have to get up earlier than they're used to.

SAFETY TIPS FOR MOTORISTS

Stop at least 10 feet (3 meters) away from a school bus that has its red lights flashing and stop arm extended.

Vehicles traveling in the same direction as the bus are required to stop when the red lights are flashing. In most states, vehicles moving in the opposite direction are also required to stop, unless a concrete barrier divides the road.

Never pass a school bus on the right side, where children enter or exit.

"Passing a school bus while loading and unloading students is illegal," Weir said. "The flashing red lights and stop-arm are obvious signals for motorists to stop and are there for a reason. Today's drivers have more distractions in their vehicles than ever before. People have to understand that they cannot drive distracted and be safe."

5 Quick Back to School Breakfast Ideas

by Rachael Moshman

Thinking about breakfast and what you can have on hand to make sure your twins have something healthy to eat even when you rushed in the morning? Check out these ideas for quick, on-the-go breakfasts...

1. MAKE BREAKFAST BAGS.

Set up an assembly line on Sunday afternoon to make five breakfast bags for each child. Good fillers include fruit, hard boiled eggs, string cheese, dry cereal, granola bars and trail mix. Include a few different items to make a complete breakfast. Your child can eat it on the way to school. I also tuck a few extra granola bars in my daughter's backpack for mornings when we run out of time and she forgets to grab breakfast to go.

2. HAVE IT ALREADY ON THE TABLE.

Put out cereal, bananas, bowls, and spoons the night before. Make sure the milk carton is at the front of the

Continued on page 29





BIG BEN

by Jacqueline Davidson Kopito and Amy Davidson Lombardo

Amy and I were never in the same class in school, except for kindergarten. What a great year! When the kids were being dropped off on the first day of kindergarten, most of them were crying and wouldn't let go of their parents' hands. This was not the case for Amy or me. We walked into class fearlessly. We had each other and therefore we had no worries. We were ready for an exciting new year.

Amy and I made friends quickly. All the boys and girls thought we were so lucky to have a twin, and many would say "I wish I had a twin!" Even at an early age, our classmates knew that having a twin was like having the perfect friend; someone who could understand you better than anyone else. They were right! Our classmates also really seemed to enjoy comparing us. They would always point out our similarities and differences, and Amy and I always loved the attention. We would

sometimes dress alike though, so it was difficult for the children to tell us apart.

During the school year, we learned what all children do in kindergarten: the alphabet, numbers and counting, colors and how to tell time. Our teacher, Mrs. Z was very innovative and she created a child-sized Big Ben clock (a replica of the Clock Tower at the Palace of Westminster in London), which she used to teach the class how to tell time. The clock was made out of cardboard, was spray painted gold and had large colorful numbers on the front. The clock did not have Roman numerals like the Big Ben had in London; after all we were only Kindergarteners. The little hand and big hand were painted black and were moveable so you could easily change the time. Big Ben stood proudly in the corner of the room towering over all the students.

Aside from teaching us how to tell time, Big Ben was also used for another purpose. This was when the fun really began. At the end of the week, Mrs. Z used Big Ben to play "Who's who?" This was a game in which Amy and I would step inside Big Ben, and pop out one at a time to see if any of our classmates could identify us correctly. The right guess landed you a place in line to go home. The wrong answer sent you back to your seat until everyone else had a turn. Amy and I were always the last to leave school on Friday, but we coveted all the special attention we got because of the guessing game. I'm not sure if any of our classmates actually learned to tell time that year, but everyone learned to tell us apart!

Many of my kindergarten friends with whom I am still good friends today don't even think Amy and I look alike anymore. They see us as distinctly different people which we are even though we share many of the same interests, personality traits and mannerisms. The friends that I meet on my own who meet Amy afterwards will sometimes confuse us. After they spend some time with the both of us they say that the differences jump out immediately. I always believe that good friends take the time to learn how to tell us apart, just as our classmates did back in kindergarten, even though they had a little help from Big Ben! 💖

Jacqueline Davidson Kopito and twin sister, **Amy Davidson Lombardo**, have written a short book entitled **Tales of the Twins: Life Stories of Identical Sisters**. It is a collection of funny little anecdotes about what it is like to be a twin and it answers some of the questions that always seem to arise when people meet identical twins. Read more from these talented twins by visiting their website: www.talesofthetwins.com



Twin Discrimination

AN OLD PROBLEM WITH A NEW LABEL

by Lauren Kramer

First, a story: It was the final day of kindergarten for identical 6-year-old twins Chris and Tom. Their teacher was handing out memory books to each child. Each child except Chris and Tom, that is. Since they were twins, she figured they could just share one book. On the back page was a picture of the two boys smiling. In bright red marker, she had scrawled: "Chris and Tom. Or is it Tom and Chris?" Clearly she had no idea who was who.

"Even though my boys are young, I know it must have hurt their self-esteem," said Dawn Zamanis, who lives with her twins and three older sons in Valrico, Florida. It's an old problem with a new label. Call it twin discrimination and it's out there. It's covert and insidious and sometime you have to look carefully to find it. But once you do, you realize your twins will have to contend with great dollops of it as they grow older. And you have to think hard about how you plan to handle these slices of unfairness that are unwittingly doled out to children born together.

There are different kinds of discrimination. For example, one twin may be invited to a birthday party or play date, and the other excluded. As a parent, you're presented with somewhat of a catch-22 situation. Do you insist that your twins attend parties together or not at all, or do you grant them permission to have different friends and attend gatherings that sometimes exclude one or the other?



"To some extent that depends on their age," says Herb Collier, Ph.D., an author and expert in child and family psychology. "While your pre-kindergarten twins won't understand that one is being excluded from a birthday party, once they get a bit older, I advocate that parents help their twins to differentiate," he said.

"Identity is a real issue here, and you want to let the twins know that even though they may look alike, they can have different friends and different interests," Dr. Collier explained. "If you treat them like identicals the whole time, they never learn to be their own persons."

For her 6-year-olds, Zamanis has an all-or-nothing policy when it comes to birthday parties. "At any time, if one twin is not invited to an event or a party and the other is, we politely decline," she said. "My boys now know that although it may not be intentional on the part of the host to discriminate, it does hurt feelings. Therefore, we feel that if both cannot attend, then we just decline, and my boys are OK with that."

Kimberly Fullbright, mom of twins Madison and Kylee in Littleton, Colorado sees things differently. "If one should be invited to a party and the other is not, it must be because they have learned to make their own friends and have established a sense of self, which I highly promote," she said. "I think it is imperative that the girls have their own sense of identity. Even though feelings may get hurt, in the end they are not the same person and should not be treated as though they are. I will do all that I can on my end to ensure that they know they are not in fact, one person with two names."

From the word discrimination comes the derivative to discriminate, or distinguish. Many instances of discrimination against twins come from the inability or refusal of those around them to distinguish one from the other, an insistent preference to view and treat these two individuals as a single unit. It's a state of confusion you encounter often as a parent of twins, even if your kids don't look much alike. The moment some people hear the word twins, they think "identical" and decide seconds later that the two—particularly if they are same sex—cannot be distinguished from one another.

Collier believes it is incumbent upon parents of twins to make it easier for people to discriminate one twin from the other. "If twins are not recognized by people like coaches and teachers, it's the parents' responsibility to make sure they can be differentiated, either by coiffing them differently, or giving them different necklaces or bracelets or clothing," he said. "I think some of the problem lies with the parents, who think it's cute to dress their twins the same."

Eileen Pearlman, Ph.D., a monozygotic twin, author and specialist in multiple births, agrees. "It's important to educate teachers, family members and coaches that the kids are individuals with their own feelings, temperaments, strengths and weaknesses, and that we need to treat each one as an individual," she said. "Sometimes people are just not aware that kids born on the same day are actually two people."

That didn't help Zamanis when her kids were in kindergarten. Though they dressed differently and had completely different personalities, their teachers continued to confuse them. "My son Tom developed a habit of walking up to his teachers and classmates and saying "I am Tom, so as not to be mistaken for his brother Chris." She recalled. "He became so self-conscious of people calling him by Chris' name that he just decided he would prevent the frustration he was almost certain to feel by not allowing himself to be confused with Chris in the first place."

It's a scenario Fullbright experiences often. "I just put a smile on my face and cheerfully tell the doctors and day care providers who is who each and every time I see them," she said. "After all, having twins is difficult and maybe it is too much to ask that someone take a few extra moments to decipher between the two."

Situations such as these have taught the Zamanis family important coping strategies, "As a parent, I realize the importance of treating each twin as if they were singletons, with different talents, abilities and special qualities that make them unique," she said. "These acts of discrimination, though not deliberate, have actually brought my boys much closer. They look out for one another much more, and realize the importance of fairness and inclusion of both or none in activities that they both enjoy. I'm very proud of how protective they have become about each other's feelings, and we've all certainly grown as a result of their experiences."

TIPS ON PREVENTING TWIN DISCRIMINATION...

- Forego the cuteness of dressing twins alike and focus instead on enhancing their individuality
- Give the people who interact with your twins clear, consistent clues on how to distinguish between your twins if they are identical
- Educate people who fail to distinguish your twins from one another that they are individuals and should be treated thus, not as a single unit
- Educate your twins. They can learn how to help others distinguish between them, even when others are not very polite or considerate. They also can learn others' insensitivity is not a verdict on the state of their individuality or the twinship ♥

Lauren Kramer is a freelance writer who lives in Vancouver with her husband and three children, including twins.

HOW DO YOU DRESS YOUR TWINS?

Always the same	40%
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Never the same	6%

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The **MYTHS** of Motherhood

by Carol B. Cowley, M.S.N.



Like many new mothers of twins, I managed to get through that first year by sheer willpower putting one foot in front of the other, changing diaper after diaper, almost as if in a trance. However, by the time our twins were 15-months old, I was feeling increasingly overwhelmed and hopeless about my ability to continue juggling the many spheres of my life that felt so out of my control: two active toddlers, a demanding job, worries about day care and all those never-ending chores. I was afraid to slow down and ashamed to ask for help.

But continuing to live my life this way began to exact a toll on my physical and emotional health. I got pneumonia when the boys were 1-years-old, and I had a fever that continued for more than a year. Then I began to awaken at three o'clock every morning, unable to get back to sleep. When the alarm went off, I would lie in bed exhausted, feeling a sense of despair and dread, wondering how I could face another day.

That dark mood began to permeate every aspect of my life. At one point, I remember crying almost daily during my long commute to pick the boys up from day care. I waited, hoping to "snap out of it." Yet the sadness continued.

Finally, I summoned the courage to ask my doctor for a referral to a therapist. Asking for help and admitting that I suffered from depression represented a giant step for me. With the help of a gifted therapist and a course of antidepressant medication, I began the process of emerging from my depression. This involved making some logistical changes in our daily routine in order to reduce stress, as well as trying to understand and change the negative "self-talk" that fueled my depression.

Our boys are now almost 6 and life seems much easier than when they were babies. In retrospect, I can see that there were several core "myths" that contributed to my depression and robbed me of my ability to enjoy those early years with our new family. I share these core myths along with the realities, as I now see them, with the hope that other new mothers of multiples might read them and discover ways to be gentler on their own self.

MYTH #1

You should always feel lucky and blessed to be the mother of twins. Our culture still romanticizes motherhood, perpetuat-

ing the myth that being home with infants or young children is always joyful and easier than being out in the “real” world. Therefore, being home with two babies as once must be “twice the joy”. How many times have strangers stopped you on the street and confessed “I’ve always wanted to have twins. I think it would be so much fun!” The message I got from society was that I should feel joyous, but in those initial months at home with our babies, I felt mainly exhausted and overwhelmed. I concluded, therefore, that I must be a bad (or at least, inadequate) mother. I could no longer see or appreciate the creative ways I was managing to love and care for two babies at once.

REALITY

You can love your twins unconditionally and feel blessed to have two beautiful babies. However, you do not always have to love trying to meet the physical and emotional needs of two babies simultaneously, nor always rejoice over the way your life has so drastically changed. Caring for two babies at once is one of the hardest things you may ever do in your life. And no one else, unless they have multiples of their own, can understand what it really feels like. Any reasonable person would at times feel exhausted, overwhelmed, and vulnerable to depression when faced with relentless stream of diapers, feedings and months of sleep deprivation. Expect to feel a wide spectrum of emotions once your twins arrive. You are not alone in your experience: Studies have found significantly high rates of chronic exhaustion among mothers of young twins (76% versus only 8% among mothers of singletons) and rates of depression ranging from 30% to 50% (three to five times the rates among mothers of singletons). We typically think of postpartum depression (PPD) as having its onset within three months of childbirth. However, experts on PPD now emphasize that women are at increased risk for depression for up to three years after giving birth.

MYTH #2

Taking time for yourself is selfish and means you’re not taking care of your family. One of the most difficult things for mothers of multiples is to take time for ourselves. Especially when our babies are little, they have so many physical and emotional needs that require our attention. In my case, I had a supportive and involved husband who did his best to give me some breaks. However, the guilt and ambivalence that I experienced when I did take time away from our babies simply made the psychological costs of nurturing myself too high.

REALITY

“You cannot give from an empty cup.” And you can’t replenish your cup unless you take a break. Taking some time for yourself (to simply take a walk or have coffee with a friend) is important, not only for your well-being, but for your babies’ as well. A recent study of mothers of very young twins found that

mothers who asked for help and were less exhausted were much more sensitive and responsible to their babies’ individual needs. Of course, the reality is that any dedicated “Mommy Time” is extremely limited and therefore, precious. Protect it fiercely and spend it only on activities that you truly enjoy or with people who delight and nurture you.


MYTH #3

Each individual decision I make about how I raise my twins is critically important to their future well-being. Making the wrong decision could be devastating. As mothers, we are faced with a never-ending stream of choices regarding the care of our children: Breastfeed or bottle feed? Return to work or stay home? The list seems endless. Unless we are careful, we can begin to expend too much energy worrying about making the “right decision,” losing sight of the bigger picture with respect to the good jobs we do as mothers.

REALITY

The decisions you make about caring for your twins deserve careful consideration. But it is the sum of all your decisions and the daily interactions with your children that matter the most. Trust yourself. No one knows your twins better than you do. If it turns out that a decision was not the best one in the long run, you will know that and will have even more information under your belt to draw upon the next time you’re faced with a difficult decision.

I know now that the love I have for my twins is like an iceberg. The tiny, exposed tip of the iceberg represents the day-to-day decisions: one crib or two, same classroom or separate? But those decisions are supported by the unseen, massive body of the iceberg, comprised of all the loving interactions, attention, and care I have given our boys. I know that it is the powerful base of the iceberg that shapes and nurtures them in the long run.

Raising twins is a unique challenge and it is hard work. Don’t make your job even harder by letting these or other myths about motherhood rob you of your ability to see just how creative and capable you are. While some days will feel harder than others, there should also be some days when you can find ways to nurture yourself and take pleasure in the things you do. If these good days begin to disappear, especially if you notice other symptoms of clinical depression such as difficulty sleeping or eating, feel sad, worthless, or hopeless about the future, don’t hesitate to seek professional help. Asking for support during times of stress is not a sign of weakness, but rather a testament to how much you value and treasure your children, your family and yourself. 

Carol B. Cowley, M.S.N. is from Boulder, Colorado and is an OB/GYN nurse practitioner and the mother of identical twin boys.

CHOOSING A DAYCARE FOR TWINS

This story begins a few months before our twins, Joshua and Abigail, were even born. Actually, we probably hadn't named them by this point. You might ask why would anyone start searching for a daycare before their children are even born? Fair question. But first of all, allow me to address why parents might choose a day care centre for daily care giving after both have returned to work.

We did consider the option of a nanny. In fact, we had a nanny part-time, three mornings a week during the last few months of the maternity leave. But since both my wife and I are teachers, we feel that social stimulation for children is vital and the best place to get this is at a full service day care. Twins do have each other, but they cannot get enough stimulation just from one another. This is not a healthy situation in my opinion. It is true that parents, nannies, and grandparents can take babies and toddlers to community and library programs for some stimulation. But



THE HOWS and WHYS

by Steven Jeffries

there are only so many of these. My wife attended quite a few, and as those with twins or multiples know, it isn't always easy. Sometimes, she had help from the nanny or a grandparent, but she even enjoyed a stroller fitness class with her two babies in her large double stroller!

We realized that the cost of two infants and toddlers in day care would be greater than sponsoring (in Canada) a live-in nanny but we were willing to do this if we could find the right day care centre. I had worked in day cares during my university years and knew what to look for as far as quality was concerned. I will share this information with you later in this article. Of course, many people opt for home day cares, but one of the things to consider with those is that the range of children can be quite varied, and, as an example, many home day cares in Ontario can only accept five children. Check your state or provincial government to find out what the ratios for each type of care and age group are in your community. We were pretty sure that we had a great day care nearby, because so many people we knew were recommending it highly—but that meant getting on the list over a year ahead, pre-birth, in order to secure two of ten spots in the infant care room. And so we did.

DAY CARE WAITING LISTS

One thing that we learned quickly is that day care waiting lists are unique and unpredictable creatures. You have to be constantly in touch with the centre's director because the list changes and they have no way of predicting the availability of space. Siblings of families already enrolled usually get priority and can jump the cue. Also, if you are in a centre that is part of a large group, as ours was, children transferring from one centre to another may also get priority. My advice is to ask how the list works because each centre will be different. Another factor was that the centre we wanted changed directors and since the new director didn't know us, we were no longer a priority. It is also a fact of life that twins and multiples are a bit of a pain to accommodate compared to a singleton and so it is difficult to find two spaces at the time you want them.

This meant that we were finally informed that there would not be space for our twins in the infant room. Infant care in Ontario is for babies from about two or three months to eighteen months. Toddler care is from 18 months to four years but they can accept up to three children aged 15 to 17 months. We didn't have to

many other options at this late stage. But we got incredibly fortunate on two fronts. A nearby centre that we toured that was in the same group of day cares as the one we could not get in to, had two spaces for our kids at 17 months in their toddler room. The director there gave us priority because we were already in their system. This day care turned out to be fantastic for our kids. Joshua and Abigail even entered it despite still not walking yet, and learned to do so within the first month of being there.

The second fortunate event was the offer from my wife's parents, who lived around the corner from us at the time, to care for our twins in their home for the first three-and-a-half months of Lisa's return to work. At first we didn't want to burden them with the responsibility, but they were so keen and we were confident they would do a good job. We set them up with all the equipment they would need, and brought in the part-time nanny to help and give them relief. This bridged the time from mid-March to the summer, when we were both off. It, not surprisingly also saved us a large sum of money. Infant care is very expensive because of the very low ratios of staff to infants.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A DAY CARE CENTER

When I was doing my undergraduate studies and shortly following graduation, I had the opportunity to work in full service day cares. This experience helped guide us in our choices, but truthfully, much of it comes out to gut instincts and the impression a particular centre has on you. For example, one centre we visited had the smell of urine, and that was an automatic no go. Another had a supervisor who sat in her office the entire time, while a staff member gave us the tour. The children there were clearly bored and misbehaving, and one child ran into my wife at full speed while attempting to give her a hug.

There are four things that you should look for in a good daycare. The first is cleanliness. From my experience, a child care centre is extremely hard to keep clean. Kids are constantly, eating, playing, doing arts and crafts, coming and going from outside, and having sunscreen put on them, not to mention the occasional toilet accident. So if a centre looks really clean, the staff there have put in the effort to make it so. This brings us to the staff itself. The director or supervisor is certainly a key person, and likely the one you will first meet. She should make a good impression, and come across as caring about the welfare of your children and those in the centre. It is wise to visit the centre during the course of a normal day. Watch to see the demeanour of the staff. Are they genuinely happy to be there? Is their attention on the children? Or are they chatting amongst themselves? At the centre we chose for the toddler room, we were impressed not only by the supervisor and her thoroughness, but there was a staff member we were introduced to, and my wife said afterwards that she hoped our kids would be taught by her. As it turned out, they were, and she was even better than the great first impression she gave.

Programming is the third important area to think about. It should be comprehensive and follow some sort of weekly and/


or monthly theme. It should not be "whatever the kids are interested in" as we were told at one centre. Apparently, they had been learning about bugs for several weeks! Most day cares post the programming plan on the wall, and many send home a monthly newsletter. Safety also comes into play here. Does the centre have safe practices and good documentation of any incidents that occur? Last but not least, check out what kind of outdoor playground and/or play area they have. There are more and more day cares located in industrial parks or strip plazas that have very small outside areas with limited equipment.

The final important area to inquire about is the food. What is the menu and are there enough healthy choices? Some jurisdictions conduct health and/or food inspections of day care facilities. If so, ask to see how the centre did on its latest inspection. Centres may post these up on the wall for parents. Is there an on-site chef or is the food brought in from outside? How are allergies or religious preferences dealt with? As a Jewish family, having a centre that understood that we did not wish our children to eat pork or eat milk and meat together was important to us. Remember, no matter what the issue is, you have the right to ask before you sign your child up for care. And be sure to take a tour of the centre to allow those parental instincts to guide your decision.

TOGETHER OR SEPARATE?

Just as this will become an issue once your twins are in school, it could become an issue in a full service day care as well, although not nearly as likely. The reason it is not likely is that there is usually only one room per age group, and so movement between rooms is limited. But while our kids were in the junior room in their current day care, we were asked to move one of them up to the kindergarten room ahead of the other.

There were two reasons given for this: a staff member was worried that one would follow the other around. The other, more practical reason, was that a spot had opened up in the kindergarten room suddenly, and since our kids were the oldest, one of them should be the child to move up. Neither of these reasons was satisfactory to us, and so we declined, and asked that our kids eventually be moved up together, which happened a few months later. Not only do most centres not have the ability to separate twins, they also usually have no policy either on the separation of twins or close-aged siblings. However, the centre might have preference or a "normal" way of handling such a situation, but as a parent of twins, you know what is best for them and should make it clear what you want.

We knew a few things about day cares when we started this journey before the birth of our twins. But as you now know, we have learned a lot from our own experiences that may be of help to you. If there is a cardinal rule for choosing a daycare for multiples, it might just be "Look early! Look often!" 

Steven Jeffries is an elementary teacher, husband, and father of five year old twins. He resides near Toronto, Canada. You can check out his blog at <http://atwinsdad.blogspot.ca/>.

My Kids Will NEVER Do That

by Bill McGee

Every parent has them. The 10 Commandments of Perfect Parenting that you were sure you'd never violate. Do you remember yours? The list of "Thou shalt nots..." you practically had inscribed on stone tablets. The rules usually consist of a rigid parental standard requiring the compliance of, say, a 3-year-old not to mention your spouse and society at large. Who were we kidding? See if any of the following sound familiar:

My kids will never:

#1) Watch TV or Videos—It seemed like a reasonable rule. You envisioned your children always productively engaged in wholesome, Amish-like activities, such as churning butter, communing with nature or fashioning a new quilt. Then reality intruded. It's a snowy day. The kids are home sick. You're home sick with them. What's it going to be, cabin-fever-breath—a real-life reenactment

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of *The Shining* or a pleasant, minimal-effort viewing of *Toy Story 3*?

#2) Eat Junk Food—This is a tough one, since one person's junk food is another's Pritikin Diet. (You remember Pritikin—the low-salt, low-fat, low-sugar alternative to living.) Judging by the feedback I receive from family and friends and co-workers, I'm a junk food junkie. And my wife is a purist. Lisa makes sure the girls get healthy, wholesome stuff, but I say "what's childhood without a few Cokes, Twinkies and Fritos?" Between us, our children get a good balance.

#3) Run Around the House Naked—Not that there's anything wrong with that. Our 4-year-old twin daughters wear clothes most of the time, except both of them have a predilection for dancing naked in the living room. I knew my Woodstock roots would catch up with me some day. I admonish the girls to wear panties, please. They don't always listen. I expect a stern email any day from the tightly wound covenant committee in our subdivision.

#4) Break Into a Pathetic, Piercing Wail and Collapse in a Heap on the Floor of the Grocery Store, Looking Like the Poster Person for Child Abuse, Blocking Traffic and Attracting 'Concerned' Onlookers from Three Aisles Over—We don't really need to discuss this one, do we?

#5) Act like Wild Animals in Public—remember how offended you were when other people's offspring couldn't behave? So were we—until Cousin John's wedding, a couple hundred relatives couldn't wait to see the twins. We were eager to show them off.

Two years old... dressed in their fancy dresses and white patent leather shoes and were just as cute as buttons. Knew a lot of words, even how to dance. They went around to every table. Made us proud with something we'd never witnessed before. Barked like dogs. Charming!

#6) Be Put on a Leash—See #5. Didn't those contraptions seem awful before you had squirming, slippery twin toddlers scattering in different directions? Now leashes seem like a rather enlightened, you might even say restrained, solution to provide young'uns freedom to wander, while keeping them in touch with the mother ship.

#7) Wear Disney or other Character Clothing—Boy did we sell out quickly. First it was the Little Mermaid sneakers...then it was the Strawberry Shortcake t-shirts. Then we moved on to the Winnie-the-Pooh bed sheets. But heck, this stuff is just so cute. If anyone from Nike is reading this, we would consider putting twin swooshes on their pre-school back packs for the right price.

#8) Do the Macarena for Company—granted, the mere mention of the M word is enough to bring out the barf bags, but you know what I mean. Your adorable twins can sing a song, recite a current commercial or give high fives. Why not share that skill with the family, friends and neighbors?

#9) Get a Flat-Top Haircut with a Rat Tail in Back—it's easier to adhere to this one when you only have girls. Of course, we did get their hair cut into a page boy style. But that was because when it was long, it took so long to dry after their baths. Hey, wait a minute—I bet flat-tops dry really quickly!

#10) Wear Identical Clothes—we usually stick to the policy of separate but equal. You know, one has a green jacket and the other one has the same jacket, but in purple. However, about three times a year, we break down and dress them

identically. That usually lasts about five minutes, since one will immediately pull her shirt out of her pants, while the other will turn her shirt around and tuck it in. Shortly thereafter, one's socks will be gone, while the other has spilled grape juice (no, not the white kind) all over her top.

Maybe it's time to start the list for the teenage years. My kids will never be caught smoking cigarettes outside the 7-11, my kids will never cut class, and my kids will never get anything other than their ears pierced... ♡



5 Quick Back to School Breakfast Ideas continued from page 20

fridge. Instruct children to pour themselves some cereal and eat as soon as they get up.

3. PUT YOUR FREEZER TO WORK.

Make extra servings when you prepare breakfast on the weekends. Store individually wrapped single servings in the freezer. You or your child can simply heat one in the microwave before school each morning. Simple breakfasts include sandwiches of ham and egg on English muffins or sausage links wrapped in a pancake. I plan on making a dozen breakfast sandwiches before school starts to store in the freezer.

4. RELY ON AN OLD STANDARD.

Peanut butter and jelly is a filling, healthy, kid-friendly and fat-free breakfast! Up the nutrition value by using low sugar jam and whole grain bread. Add a piece of fruit and a glass of milk to round out the meal. My daughter loves a peanut butter and a banana rolled in a tortilla.



5. LET THEM EAT

BREAKFAST AT SCHOOL.

Most schools serve breakfast in the cafeteria for under \$2 a meal. If ensuring your children get breakfast adds an extra layer of chaos to your morning, make sure they get to school early enough to eat there instead. This option often saves time and money! My daughter's school allows parents to see what their child purchases online, so I know if she's really eating breakfast or just pocketing the money to buy ice cream at lunch.

With a little planning, you can be sure your child has a healthy breakfast no matter how rushed you are. ♥



Continued from page 15

TODDLERS

A quality physician only orders test when they are necessary tests. Today things are different. Insurance companies oversee testing payments and won't allow unnecessary tests to be done. You can rest assured that your doctor will only order tests that are important.

PAYMENT PLANS

Bring your co-pay, insurance cards, credit card or cash. Your driver's license or identification is required for the first appointment, in order for your children to be seen. If you are having financial problems, many offices will allow you to use a payment plan. Like any other service providers, doctors expect and appreciate timely payment.

KNOW YOUR DOCTOR AND THE STAFF

Even as your doctor finds it important to know certain things about your family, there are things you may want to know about your doctor. It's time to ask how long your pediatrician or family practice doctor has been in practice and where he or she attended medical school. The physician and the office staff should be friendly and polite. They should return your phone calls in a timely fashion. It's important that their office be clean and well-organized.

WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD HEALTH

It takes extra preparation to make smooth office visits. Be especially alert when procedures or immunizations are being given to your twins—you're an important element of safeguarding them from medical mistakes. If the room is noisy or chaotic, it's possible the nurse could become distracted and administer a shot to the wrong child. With your watchful eye, mistakes can be prevented.

Your doctor and the office staff care about your family's health and will give you wise counsel, to the very best of their ability. Have reasonable expectations for relief of symptoms and cures. Not everything can be "fixed" instantly and medicine is as much art as science. ♥



by Elizabeth Montanya

NAVIGATING

THE TEEN YEARS WITH BOY/GIRL TWINS



Having a child is a lifelong exercise in patience. Having more than one child is a special journey. Having twins; put on your seatbelt. Having boy/girl twins who are polar opposites, see the world from two wildly separate perspectives, handle situations completely differently, and yet demand totally equal treatment by virtue of their birthright as twins, is a tightrope balance of power not seen since Khrushchev held sway in the USSR.



Beginning our journey with twins, my husband and I (foolishly) thought: we can do this... After all, we have experience. When the twins were born, we were already somewhat successfully managing our then seven-year old and three-year old boys and a six-year old girl sandwiched in between. We had the whole boy v. girl thing down. We'd seen it—they play differently, they cope differently, they mature differently. Check, check and check: Got it.

But what we did not get is the twin bit. Our eldest was, is, and always will be, bigger than his sister (who is a tad more than a year younger). He started out big and just got bigger along the way. His size matched his booming voice and winner-take-all demeanor—successfully dwarfing his kid sister on many levels. But, in reality, that size differential didn't mean a lick compared to his age. Whatever happened in their physical growth, he was always going to be older than her. That trumped all. Who went to school first while the other still stayed home with mom? Who got to be on the swim team first? Who joined Scouts first? Fast forward to the real kickers... Who went to the junior/senior prom first? Who got a real job first? Who got their license first? Now, that's power.

THE GREAT MIDDLE SCHOOL DIVIDE

Nature wins mostly. Girls mature faster than boys, so in middle school when the female twin towered above her brother, she far out swam him. She brought home times that bested his hands down. She was center on the rec league basketball team. That maturity translated over to academics—she paid attention at school. She dutifully took down every note and made lists

of things to do. For our part, there wasn't a lot of parenting to do. She did her homework, went to practice and received high praise from her teachers, coaches, scout leaders, etc., etc.

Contrarily, her male twin showed up to swim practice primarily to have a water fight with his buddy in lane two, and went to school purely for lunch period and phys. ed. Most days he wouldn't have brought home his coat, books, lunch box or even shoes from school if it weren't for his twin sister. Parenting this one was a task not for the faint of heart. It went from "Let's sit down and do your homework together—it will be fun!" to "Please do your homework, please just get it done" to "If your homework is not done you will not be able to play in the game on Wednesday" to "Where is your homework? Can you even find your backpack?"

Then, on the weekend, he couldn't figure out why his twin sister got to go out and he was condemned to his room. The only thing he recognized (and was completely backed up by his astonished friends) was that he was the same age as his sister, and she had rights and privileges that he did not.

He responded to our pleas just the way he did to coaches, criticisms, and competitions—on a completely different plane



than his sister. He wasn't in it for what somebody else wanted out of him, he was in it for what he wanted out of it.

While his sister towed the line, he was not in any line at all, resulting in different responses from his parents. And, all he saw was the inequity of the twinship.

In all fairness, I must interject here that although they had

their string of not quite knock-down, drag-out scuffles; each thought the other was a good friend and great fun. They were the perfect matched and mis-matched set. He has a dimple on his left cheek, she on her right. He is fair with curly hair; she is olive-skinned with dark straight hair. Most meals would see each exchanging items off their plates. She likes chicken, he doesn't. He likes steak, she doesn't. He likes peanut butter, she likes jelly. Halloween always ended with "The Great Candy Swap:" A Butter Finger™ for a Mounds™, Good and Plenty™ for Mike and Ikes™. It went on for hours.

PLAYING CATCH-UP

Fast forward to high school. Now at 17, the previously uninterested male student has discovered that when you open, and read, a book—it may have some value. Moreover, while his sister has left athletics behind, he was brought up to the varsity team as a freshman, competes successfully in a variety of sports and now physically towers over his twin.

So, you think, all evened out... Au contraire... family dynamics have long memories. For a decade and a half, and especially during those "wonder years" she dominated the twinship. Everyone here knew it. It is hard to let go of common practices.

Even though he grew up and caught up, there was no credit at home or amongst the family.

Now, interject the new power dynamic: Who's got the hot new boyfriend or girlfriend? Who has money in their wallet thanks to a job? And absolutely most importantly, whose turn is it to have the car?

Any tiffs they had during their childhood about inequities or sharing are now magnified 10 fold. Today, it is an out-and-out power struggle. They monitor car privileges like a security guard

for the Mona Lisa. They know who has driven it where, how many miles were added, and a to-the-penny accounting of gas use.

Every morning of their senior year in high school, it was Battle Royale. And, without the presence of their older brother who had gone off to college in the fall (and, who, by virtue of his age, always got first dibs on the vehicle, and left no option for recourse). The fight was on.

Let's add in here one more bump in the proverbial road. The "car talk" took place as they were leaving for school at 6:00 am (what school system thinks that makes sense for teenagers?) and receiving email updates about the day's practice and work schedules. The "car talk" was never pretty; because for all of my sweet little twin girl's charms, she is a downright alien in the morning. While her brother and I exchanged pleasantries and chit chat over breakfast and making lunch each morning, she generally bulldozed her way through the kitchen 15 minutes late in the visage of a screaming banshee. She is the third rail of danger before 9:00 am. Mostly, we were afraid.

I was not going to dip my toe in the pool of froth that was the daily "car talk." I did what any self-respecting parent would do in this situation, I ran. Thus, leaving her erstwhile happy-go-lucky twin to face her on his own. Poor guy. I could tell you stories, but you wouldn't believe them—including one where she stopped the car dead in the middle of a busy commuter route and demanded he get out; or the one where she threw a huge tumbler of milk on him (and all his clothes and the car) after arriving at school when the "car talk" did not result in her favor. It was not pretty.

THE TIDES HAVE TURNED

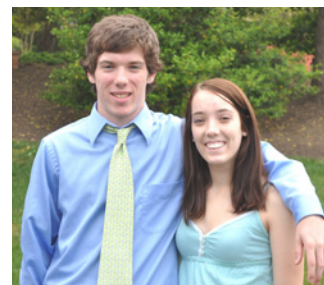
While he had spent weekends in his room paying for his lack of attention to homework in middle school, it was now time for retribution. I knew we had to take action on her lack of civil discourse with her twin. This was it.

I got advice from various sources. Mostly, the consensus was that there was just too much togetherness. Once they leave the confines of daily life together and go off to college separately, they will be fine.

College acceptances (and rejections) rolled in. They each visited various campuses and drew their personal reflections about each school. They researched the majors, toured the buildings, visited the area attractions, and made their decisions.

We are packing for their future now; dorm supplies, books and backpacks...our little twins are all grown up and are off to find themselves in a whole new world. Soon, they will be on their own...

...Did I mention they decided to go to the same college? ♥



Elizabeth Montanya is a freelance writer who lives in the Washington, D.C., area with her husband and five children.

Double Takes

August/September

2012



1 Lyndsay & Lydia
Age 7- ID
Houston, TX



4 Hudson & Brewer
Age 2- ID
Wetumpka, Alabama



5 Kailey & Kole
Age 6 1/2- FR
Aurora, CO



6 Harley & Addison
Age 5 1/2- ID
Minford, Ohio



10 Logan & Lucas- Age 3- FR
Leighton & Liana- Age 2
Richmond, Texas

(These two sets of twins are only 1 year and 2 weeks apart!)



11 Christiano & Aviana
Age 13-months- FR
Cheektowaga, New York



12 Aaron & Alex
Age 4- ID
Cincinnati, OH



16 Kiptyn Reid & Kedryk Neil
Age 20 months- ID (mirror image)
Roann, Indiana



17 Marijo & Ana Paula
Age 10- ID
Mexico City, Mexico



18 Jayden & Jesse
Age 7- ID
Fitchburg, Massachusetts



2 Alexander and Christian
Age 2 1/2- ID
Akron, OH



3 Jeanna Margarette & Matthew James
Age 2- FR
Dumaguete City, Negros Oriental, Philippines



7 Ramsey & Grady
Age 9 months- FR
Columbia, South Carolina



8 Morris and Cate
Age 2 1/2 yrs old- FR
Macon, Georgia



9 Hallie and Abby
Age 2 1/2- ID
Poulsbo, Washington



13 Claire, Olivia & Owen
(singleton brother Evan is 8)
Age 3- FR triplets
Mount Pulaski, IL



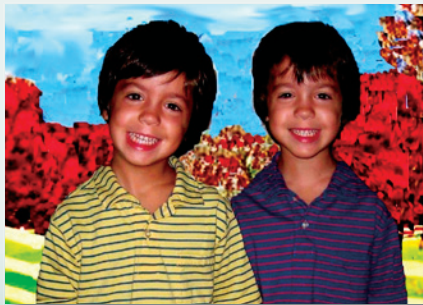
14 Conner & Cooper
Age 3- FR
Eminence, Kentucky



15 Malena & Sofia
Age 9-ID
Yakima, Washington



19 Ran & Rin
Age 4- ID
Osaka, Japan



20 Kade & Blake
Age 4- ID
Davie, FL



21 Ben & Jake
Age 5- ID
Reno, NV



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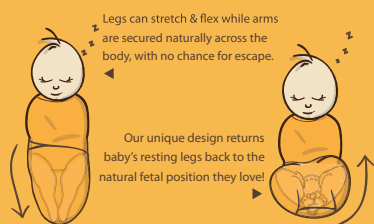
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by Meredith Bland

Down With a Sickness

7am: Oh god. Oh no. Am I.....I am. I'm sick. I'm sick on a Tuesday with 3-year-old twins. Oh no, WHY? Dear lord, why hast thou set before me this day of pain and grief? Are my days not hard enough when I'm healthy?! Giving me an illness when I have to parent is like punching an airline pilot in the face before take-off – it just puts everyone in danger.

7:10: Still in bed. I cannot possibly take care of the kids today. Maybe my husband will stay home with them? Or he could drop them off at a petting zoo or toy store? Anything that will occupy them for the next 6-8 hours.

7:30: My uncaring, unfeeling husband has left for work. Now it's just the four of us: me, the twins, and an illness I will call Maleficent. Maleficent wants me silent and horizontal. And she wants it bad.

7:35: The kids need breakfast. From the floor, I point at the refrigerator and say, "Waffle.....toast.....apple.....mmpf....." They grab themselves whatever and I crawl over to the television and turn on Nick Jr. for some sweet, sweet relief.

8:00-9:00: Agony. I am in agony IN hell. Another episode of Yo Gabba Gabba? Sure. Why not. It's not like I have any shame left today, as I lay here in my pajamas, drooling on the couch at 9:00 in the morning.

9:00-10:00: The kids.....where are the kids. Oh wait, I hear them running up the stairs to get themselves snacks (probably big handfuls of jelly beans and methamphetamines). They're very supportive, though. They keep pressing their faces up to mine and singing "Keep trying, keep trying, don't give up, never give up".

10:30: Ok. I am not going to look at the clock for a while. Then when I look at it again, it will be time to make them lunch.

Which means it will almost be time for them to nap. Ok. I can do this.

10:45: DANGIT!

11:30 Lunchtime. Look, Mommy is going to crawl up the stairs. Yeah, like a dog. Isn't that hilarious? Come on group, let's go teamwork our way into making a sandwich.

12:00: One hour till nap time. You want me to be the princess and you are the evil Queen? Perfect. Let's play Snow White. "Oh no, I am going to eat this poison apple and fall asleep.....oh.....no.....ZZZZZZZZZZZ."

Now go figure out how to wake me up. But don't touch me or talk to me. That is part of the game.

1:00: NAP TIME!! HALLEJULAH!! What's that, children? What do you mean, you don't WANT to take a nap? Guess what, buddies? I don't WANT to be sick, but I guess today is the day all of our dreams die. Now get in there so I can pat you on the head and screech out a lullaby.

1:10: Mommy out.

2:05: Aaaaaand, we're up. I send my husband an e-mail letting him know I have not "rallied" but am still feeling super bad. He replies, with a cheery, "only a few more hours!" Lucky for him, I am too weak right now to arrange for his death.

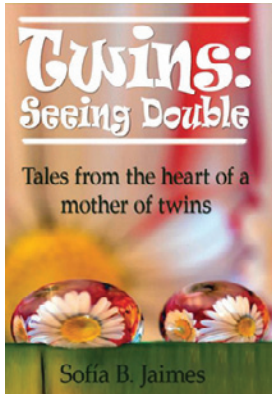
3:30-5:30: This is bad, folks. Really bad. I should not have taken Nyquil at nap time, because now I am sick AND loopy. It's like when you're driving down the freeway and all of a sudden you realize you've missed your exit, but you don't remember seeing it go by? Yeah. Like that, only one minute you are wiping a child's butt, and the next minute the butt and the child are gone and you are sitting on a cold bathroom floor with your head against the sink. "What the – ? Aw heck. Now I have to double back and find that butt."

5:30: Kids stop fighting. Kids stop fighting. Kids stop fighting. Kids stop fighting. Kids stop fighting. Kids stop fighting. Wait. Am I saying this out loud? No. "Kids stop fighting." There. Better.

5:45: Oh man. I see headlights. In our driveway. Hail, the conquering hero!! He has returned home! Here are your children. Enjoy them. I am going to turn on the bathroom fan to drown out any cries for help, getting into bed, and gracefully passing out. If I'm not better tomorrow, I will just take the kids to the library, sit on a bean bag, and cry hot, salty tears. For now, I bid you adieu.

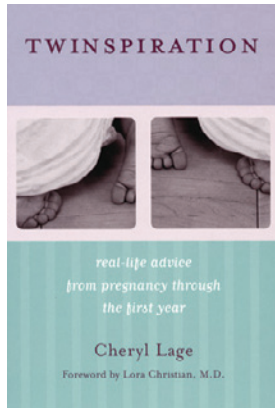
Meredith Bland is a freelance writer who blogs at Pile of Babies: Take a Knee, I Have Nonsense to Spew (<http://www.pileofbabies.com>). Pile of Babies is a finalist for Parent Map Magazine's 2012 Golden Teddy Award for Best Mom Blog.

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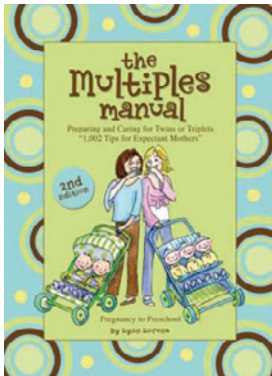
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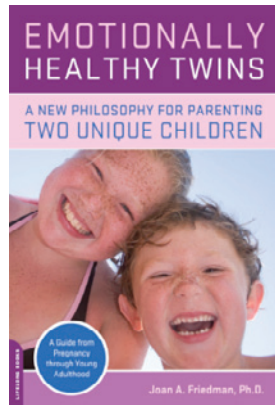
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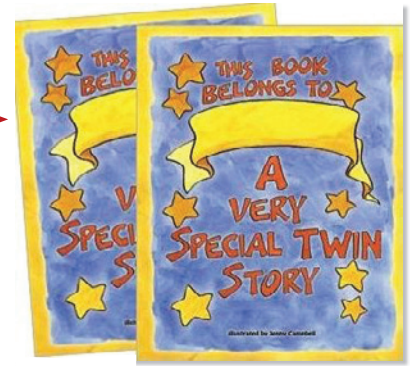
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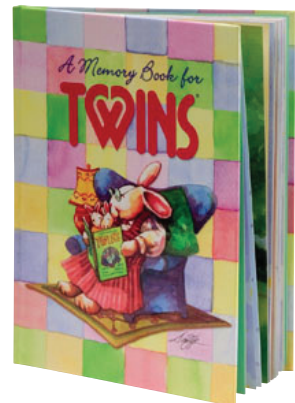
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