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# TWINS™

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July/August 2017

**OLD PROBLEM,  
NEW LABEL:**  
preventing twin  
discrimination

**Back to  
school  
special!**

**Potty  
training  
toddler  
twins**

**Getting  
ready for  
PRESCHOOL**



**Twin safety  
and the big  
yellow  
bus**

**When your  
twins don't  
get along**

**Two twins, two  
different grades**  
What to do when only  
one twin struggles





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## On the Cover



Caiden and Caison are fraternal twins from El Campo, Texas. The pair were born in 2010 and they attend Hutchins Elementary.

Caiden is very shy. He loves cars and Transformers. Caison is very outgoing and loves musical instruments and church.

They have different personalities but are very helpful to one another.

Cover Photography by Angel Brooks

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## ANOTEFROMTHEEDITOR

### Up in the mornin' and out to school...

This time of year always makes me think of a quote from one of my all-time favorite films. It's a line said by Tom Hanks (as Joe Fox) in *You've Got Mail*:

'Don't you love New York in the Fall? It makes me want to buy school supplies. I would send you a bouquet of newly-sharpened pencils if I knew your name and address.'

The start of a new school year is a special time full of opportunity and potential, and best of all — new pencils. Sadly, not everyone shares my optimism for this time of year; after all, for a lot of kids it means the start of another long year slumped over textbooks, waiting for the school day to be over.

This issue of TWINS™ Magazine has been put together as a back to school special, jam-packed with helpful hints and tips for the new school year. We take a look at what happens when twins are separated in the classroom for the first time, and the considerations that need to be made if your twins aren't ready for school at the same time. For the parents of younger twins, we have advice on getting ready for preschool, and tips on twin safety for those riding the school bus for the first time.

Separating twins in school isn't the end of the world, and in many cases can actually help them to develop their individual personalities; this extra space can even make twins fight less and appreciate each other more.

Often, if a teacher makes a recommendation for twins to be separated, it is in their best interest. Education professionals have often seen this situation before, and are the best people to advise you on your twins' classroom placement. Listen to their suggestions with an open mind. Ask your twins what they would prefer. Some twins perform better in the same class, while others thrive without being constantly compared to their co-twin.

If your twins are already in school, are they in the same classroom or not? Send an email to [twinseditor@twinsmagazine.com](mailto:twinseditor@twinsmagazine.com) and tell us what worked out best for them. In the meantime, let's enjoy these last days of summer while we still can!



Sincerely,

*Laura Cunningham*

Laura Cunningham,  
Editor-in-Chief



## TWINS IN THE NEWS



**A** brain-dead mother has successfully given birth to twins after doctors managed to keep her alive just long enough to deliver them safely.

Twenty-one year old Frankielen da Silva Zampoli Padilha died after suffering a stroke in October last year. She was kept alive on life support for 123 days — the longest time recorded in medical history.

The decision to try and save the twins — only nine-week-old embryos at the time — was made by doctors at the Nossos Senhora do Rocio hospital in Campo Largo after discovering that the twins' hearts continued to beat inside their mother's womb.

The twins — a boy and a girl — were born at seven months in February this year. Muriel Padilha, the twins' father (24) said that the birth of his children, Asaph and Anna Vitoria, is 'a miracle.'



**B**eyoncé has allegedly hired 18 new employees to help out after the arrival of her twins, Rumi and Sir Carter. The newborns now have six nannies, two maids, and a 24/7 rotating team of nurses. Bey even has a financial investment advisor to set up trademarks and trusts in the babies' names!

**B**rodie and Dylan Pawson, identical twins and parkour experts from Queensland, are heading to the Australian Ninja Warrior semi-final together. Dylan will be facing the challenge first.

Brodie told News Corp, "We're pretty similar in all aspects. If Dylan does well then I'll do well and vice versa, so that gives you confidence."



**A** couple who lost their two young sons in a car crash in 2015 are now the proud parents of twin boys. Gentry and Hadley Eddings from North Carolina welcomed Isaiah Dobbs and Amos Reed into the world on July 10. The twins were given their middle names in honor of the brothers they'll never meet.

Gentry is a worship leader at Forest Hills Church in Charlotte, while Hadley teaches pre-school at the church. The pair say that their faith helped them through their tough two years.







A pair of 84-year-old twins, Clifford and Gary Koekoek, were facing the prospect of living on the streets after taking out what they thought was a conventional loan in 2007 to fix the roof on their home that had been in their family since 1984. It turned out to be an adjustable rate loan, and their payments were increased until they could no longer afford them and the bank foreclosed.

The Koekoeks fled Nazi occupation in the Netherlands and moved to Orangevale, California, and both served in the Vietnam War. 'It's a lot of stress. I'd rather go back to the war and get shot at than this crap,' said Clifford.

A family friend set up a GoFundMe page on their behalf, which has raised over \$121,000.

A pair of miracle twins born five days apart and nearly four months premature have beaten the odds to stay alive after the doctors had said they were 'too young to save'. Twins Albert and Dolly were delivered after just 23 weeks. They are among the youngest to survive in Britain.

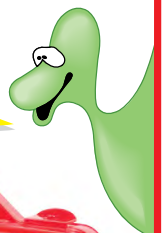
At six weeks Dolly needed surgery to fix a hole in her heart, and both twins have had surgery on their eyes. Both twins are now home and living with their parents, Shona and Darren.



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# The Luckiest Mom in the World

by Susan Eldridge

**A**fter a healthy pregnancy that produced a perfect 8 lb. baby boy I was back in my jeans in two weeks and life was great! I was so enamored with my baby that I couldn't wait to have another one — the more the better right? I always wanted to have a house full of kids, even as a little girl I would put all of my stuffed animals on the couch and pretend I was the mom and we were all at church. Little did I know how something that seemed so simple would be so hard to attain.

When my baby boy was two years old I lost a "baby" to a molar pregnancy — I was told it wasn't really a baby anyways just a tumor pretending to be one (for 3 months) and to just go home and try again! After I sat in the "tumor's" empty bedroom and cried for a few months, I did just that. But, this time I ended up with an ectopic pregnancy and when I finally found a doctor who diagnosed me correctly I went in for surgery to come out not only minus another baby but one less tube as well — devastating!

With only one tube left I decided that maybe I would need a little help getting pregnant again and went to a fertility specialist. What a great

decision! After one round of Clomid I was pregnant with triplets! I will admit after two disastrous pregnancies I was scared to death, all I was asking for was one healthy baby and I felt like I was just put into this incredibly risky situation yet again.

I clearly remember getting the phone call from the doctor's office regarding my blood tests when the nurse said, "Wow, your numbers are high — you are really pregnant!" Something in the back of my mind was telling me this was not going to be just a typical pregnancy. The first time I went in for an ultrasound it was twins, when I went back a few weeks later I had another surprise. I will never forget the ultrasound technician saying, "there's baby A and there's baby B and ... Oh my gosh, there's another one!" I replied a sarcastic, "very funny" and she looked at me and said, "No, I am serious!" They called in the doctor who was of course elated, as was I — but with feelings of trepidation, doubt, and nervousness. The question, "Was I being greedy to want so many kids?" kept running through my mind.

I walked around like a "normal" very large pregnant lady for the first 19 weeks. I didn't realize how



large until one day in line at Target the cashier asked me, "Are you due soon?" My four-year old answered for me, pointing three times on my stomach he said, "We're having three babies, this one's a boy, that one's a boy and that one has its butt up in the air so we don't know!" The cashier just stared at me and said, "Is he lying?" That was my last trip out. I was put on bedrest that week.

After 35 ½ weeks of pregnancy, trips in an out of the local hospital for "mag washes", a Terbutaline pump, and ultimately 3 months in a high risk unit of a hospital with an IV stuck in my arm I delivered three beautiful, healthy babies — two boys and a girl (the one with her butt up in the air!) I felt like the luckiest mother in the world! My daughter and one of the boys came home first but the other boy (baby A) had to stay for observation for a few days. I was holding my daughter and my husband was holding our new son when my four-year-old asked, "When is my baby coming home?" When "his" baby did come home my husband made a comment about the baby having a chubby face, my son corrected him and said, "No, he doesn't — he has sweet cheeks! We called that baby Sweet Cheeks for almost two years!

Those three babies brightened our world. Their older brother became their leader! He helped me feed them, performed for them, played with them, and pushed the single stroller when I pushed the double. There was none of the sibling rivalry or resentment I had read about. When the babies got too old to be called babies he dubbed them the "yoohoos." Throughout the years they watched each other cheerlead, swim, play baseball, basketball, football, track, soccer, and tennis while always giving their "constructive" criticism when needed.

Eighteen months ago one of the triplets had a baby of his own. One day after a sleep deprived night that comes with a new baby he said to me, "I don't know how you did it with three at one time." I answered him, the way I have answered that comment to many, many people throughout the years — it was easy! Truthfully, it was because in a lot of ways they took care of each other. I dropped them off at the same school, they all attended the same school events, they didn't have to walk into their first middle school dance alone, and they always had someone to eat lunch with at school.

Thankfully, they also had an older brother who paved the way for them, but who also required many more play dates as a singleton than they ever did as triplets. So in some ways an only child was harder than triplets!

Twenty- two years later all four of my children are in various stages of their college careers in different parts of the country. They help each other move, they call each other to complain about my helicopter parenting, they argue politics, and they confide and support each other. But, most importantly they have fun together. After the broken ceiling fans (from flying footballs), baseball size dents in my minivan, an early divorce, disappointments, failures, crazy schedules, and many, many accomplishments, I still feel like the luckiest mother in the world! ♡

Susan Eldridge is college student recruiter, mother, grandmother and freelance writer who raised her triplets and older son as a single parent for 18 years.



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Our

# Camp Secret

by Amy Davidson Lombardo  
and Jacqueline Davidson Kopito

Every summer, my identical twin sister, Jackie and I would go to sleep away camp for eight weeks and towards the end of the school year we would count the days left until the first day of camp. Our camp was called CYJ and it was a co-ed camp with a ton of water sports on a beautiful lake and many other activities including tennis, softball, volleyball, basketball, camping, arts & crafts, drama and dancing. Many of our girlfriends were there and many cute boys that we couldn't wait to see again too.

Jackie and I were in the same bunk with fourteen of our friends. The best time at camp was when we were supposed to be going to sleep. This is when all our friends would stay up late talking and trying to stay out of trouble. One night, a few of the girls in our bunk suggested a raid to bunk #13 because most of the girls, including me, liked the boys in that bunk. However, the #1 rule at camp was that campers weren't allowed to leave the bunks after bedtime, let alone scooter across camp into the boys' area. If a camper got caught by a counselor she could get kicked out of camp, but most of the time, the camper would just be grounded or docked. You never wanted to get grounded because then you couldn't do anything all day, but stay in the bunk being miserable which could last up to three or four days (UGH!).

I wasn't going to let a little rule get in my way of going on a raid and either were half the girls in my bunk. I asked Jackie if she was coming along. To my surprise, Jackie was scared of getting caught and told me she wasn't going. Why was she being such a goody-goody? Was this actually my twin sister? Where was my twin that would throw water balloons at the girls when they were acting like babies or have mud slide races when we weren't suppose to be playing in the rain? What was happening to Jackie? Plus, I knew she liked a boy in bunk



#13 that she wanted to see. I didn't understand and I was completely annoyed. My last words to her were that she was going to miss out on all the fun and that she would wish she had come along with me. Jackie was being a fool!

It was a moonless night making us almost invisible as we ran silently across the field. Within minutes, we arrived safely at bunk #13. The boys were surprised, but very happy to see us and rushed us inside. It was really fun to be out of our bunk this late at night and we sat huddled together on the floor of the bunk listening to funny stories and flirting with the boys.

Thankfully, the trip back to our bunk went off without a hitch, and as soon as I slipped inside my bunk I ran to Jackie's bed to wake her up and tell her all about the great night. But to my surprise she wasn't there. Where could she be? I decided to sit on Jackie's bed and wait for her. While sitting there wondering what to do next, Jackie crept into the bunk very quietly, not wanting to wake anyone up. "Where were you?" I whispered.

Jackie replied, "I waited and waited for you and then I couldn't wait anymore so I went looking for



## TALES FROM TWINS

you. I thought something happened to you because you were taking so long. And then on my way to boys area, Benny, (the Director of the Athletic Department) caught me.”

“Oh no! Does he know about the rest of us going on the raid?”

“No, he doesn’t know or suspect anything,” Jackie said. “I told him that a girl in our bunk dared me to get a pair of sneakers from boy’s bunk #13 and bring them back to our bunk.”

“Great cover up, but did he believe you?” I asked.

Jackie said that not only did he believe her but he seemed amused by the story, saying he would sleep on it and decide whether or not to report her to the Director of Girls. I couldn’t believe this. After my successful raid with the girls, Jackie goes looking for me and now she gets caught! What was she thinking? We both went to sleep a little annoyed with each other and hoped that Jackie wouldn’t get grounded!

I tossed and turned all night, and couldn’t stop thinking of how Jackie risked getting into trouble for me, when she didn’t even want to go in the first place. Now she was the one who could get grounded. I decided then and there that if she got grounded I would turn myself in and get grounded too.

We were on our way to breakfast when all of a sudden, Benny caught up with us and took Jackie aside. A few minutes later, they asked me to join in the conversation. Benny then told me the same thing he just told Jackie. He said, “I am letting Jackie off the hook and you too, because I have a suspicion that you had something to do with this as well. It will be our secret, but if I catch either one of you again you will have to pay the price”.

“Thank you Benny! Thank you!” I blurted out as Jackie and I gave him a big hug and then we both dashed off to breakfast.

*Final Twin Thought: Sometimes sisters and good friends can be chicken heads... but let them be! ♡*

## OVERTOYOU

### *Do your twins have one birthday cake or two?*

We asked our facebook fans whether their twins shared a birthday cake or had one each. Here are some of their answers.



*Submissions have been edited for length and clarity.*

Share ... we sing to one, he blows out the candles, then we relight candles and sing to the other, then he blows out the candles. They don’t care about sharing cake, but they each want to blow out candles themselves! They are 9 years old. They had their own smash cakes at their first birthday, but have shared a cake ever since.

— **MELODEE RABE**

My wife and I make separate cakes for our twin girls and we don’t tell each other what we’re making.

— **CHRIS PEART**

We’ve had separate cakes up until the last few years in which they’ve wanted to share one.

— **MELISSA TWISS CUSHING**

My boy/girl twins have always had one cake. Then on their 7th birthday my youngest daughter was born so now all three of them have one cake. We might do separate cakes eventually, but for now they understand how special it is that they all have the same birthday.

— **HEATHER GREEN**

Mine have always had separate cakes. Always been important to me to keep their individuality even though they are identical and sometimes liked the same things through the years. I’ve always looked at it as if they wouldn’t have been twins, they would’ve had their own anyway. :) It’s not their fault they were born on the same day, lol!

— **HOLLY HARPER STOKES**

I had separate at their 1st and did a cake and cupcakes for their 2nd. It’s going to be harder when they get older since I have B/G twins and they are already showing difference in what they like.

— **STEPHANIE LATOSKA SIEMENS**

Different every year but have always had their own candles.

— **APRIL LYNN THOMAS**

We have separate cakes and sing separately to each. I want them each to feel special and as an individual rather than a package deal.

— **RACHEL BRADSHAW PESCETTO**

# CAUTION

by Ruby Coats Mosher

## Mother at Work!

**T**he greatest risk associated with a multiple pregnancy is premature delivery. It has been estimated that half of all twins and three-quarters of all triplets are born prematurely, or before the 37th week of gestation. Exactly why premature labor occurs is not completely understood, but contributing factors may include poor nutrition; physical and mental stress; infection; metabolic disease; and uterine, placental or cervical anomalies. Although additional explanations for premature labor with multiple births concern the overstretching of the uterus and overcrowding, this seems somewhat less likely because of the number of healthy, well-nourished women who have given birth to normal-weight babies at term.

Since the precise cause of preterm labor is not known, there is no guaranteed method of prevention for all women. There are, however, some practical steps that a woman can take to reduce the risk of going into premature labor. These include securing early specialized prenatal care; strictly following physicians' instructions; keeping to a balanced and nutritious diet; reducing stress as much as possible; utilizing the physical and emotional support of others to cope with that which is inevitable; getting plenty of rest; and recognizing the signs of impending preterm labor. Before being able to recognize what is abnormal for her pregnancy, however, a woman must be familiar with her body to be able to recognize what is normal for her.

### FALSE LABOR

The uterine wall contains a powerful muscle which contracts periodically throughout a woman's life. Many non-pregnant women feel these contractions during menstruation as "cramps". Pregnant women experience two types of uterine contractions: non-labor, or Braxton Hicks contractions; and the regular contractions which result in childbirth.

Braxton-Hicks contractions are also known as false labor and are usually painless. They may be felt as a tightening or hardening of the abdomen occurring at somewhat irregular intervals. A variety

of things, ranging from changing positions or activities can also make Braxton-Hicks contractions diminish.

False labor contractions, unlike those of true labor, do not get progressively close together, and usually occur less than four times per hour and last

### IS IT LABOR...YES OR NO?

The following signs are generally recognized as indicators of possible premature labor and should be monitored and reported to your medical provider.

- **Regular uterine contractions** occurring four or more times per hour—false labor contractions will usually diminish after a time, or with a change in position; true labor contractions will continue. It is important to know that labor contractions may not be painful, or even uncomfortable.
- **Menstrual-like cramps**—these lowerabdominal cramps may be rhythmic or constant.
- **Lower, dull backache**—backache is common in pregnancy, but this will feel different than previous backaches. The ache may be continuous or intermittent, and may radiate to your sides or front.
- **Pelvic or thigh pressure**—again, this pressure will seem different than previously experienced and may be persistent or rhythmic.
- **Intestinal cramps**, diarrhea, or abdominal gas pains.
- **Vaginal discharge of water, mucus or blood**—Discharge can be a sudden rush or a persistent leaking. Bloody discharge can range from pinkish to brownish.
- **Any general feeling that something is "different"**—although nothing outwardly appears wrong, you may be subconsciously in tune with subtle changes occurring.



for only 25 seconds or so. Frequency and duration of contractions vary from pregnancy to pregnancy, however, so it is important that each woman become familiar with her own normal uterine activity.

It is suggested that a pregnant woman take time every day to monitor her uterine contractions. This doesn't mean that a woman should spend time worrying about contractions and whether they may lead to premature labor—quite the contrary. The time should be spent relaxing and simply becoming acquainted with the natural rhythms of her uterus.

One way for a woman to monitor her contractions is to lie down with a pillow behind her back so she is supported slightly onto her left side. Then, using her fingertips, she should press her abdomen gently in various locations, feeling the shape and firmness of her uterus. It can be helpful at first for a health care professional to show a woman how to palpate her uterus and to feel for contractions.

When the uterus is relaxed, it is easily indented with the fingertips. While the uterine wall is soft, the babies can be felt. It is easy for a woman to mistake the firm feel of multiple heads and bottoms as a contraction, but with experience she'll learn to distinguish the hard "bumps" of babies from a contraction in which the entire uterus tightens into a hard globular shape, and then relaxes.

It may also be difficult for a woman carrying multiples to feel contractions simply because her uterus is stretched so tight that it always seems firm. But an electronic fetal monitor strapped over the abdomen can pick up contractions even when a woman can't.

A doctor may prescribe a home electronic monitor for patients at risk for premature labor. The monitor belt is worn for a specified period

of time, then the unit is hooked up to either a telephone or computer so data can be relayed to a medical center where it is then interpreted by a nurse or physician, who decides if the mother needs further attention at that time.

Whether a woman registers her contractions herself, or they are electronically monitored, the duration of a contraction is times from the point when the uterus begins to tighten to the point of relaxation. The interval between contractions is timed from the beginning of one contraction to the beginning of the next one.

A record of monitoring sessions helps track trends toward longer or more frequent contractions. Along with the contraction times, a woman may also want to record her activities prior to the monitoring session, in case it may become evident that activities such as crying, sex, or balancing the checkbook may trigger an increase in contractions.

## PRETERM LABOR

Women carrying multiples may experience increased preterm contractions which could be a sign of impending preterm labor. As opposed to Braxton-Hicks contractions, preterm labor contractions become progressively longer, stronger and closer together. Also, the contractions of labor are associated with the cervix beginning to dilate, soften and shorten.

If a woman detects any of the signs of preterm labor, she should call her doctor at once, because if labor can be detected before the cervix undergoes significant change and before the membranes have

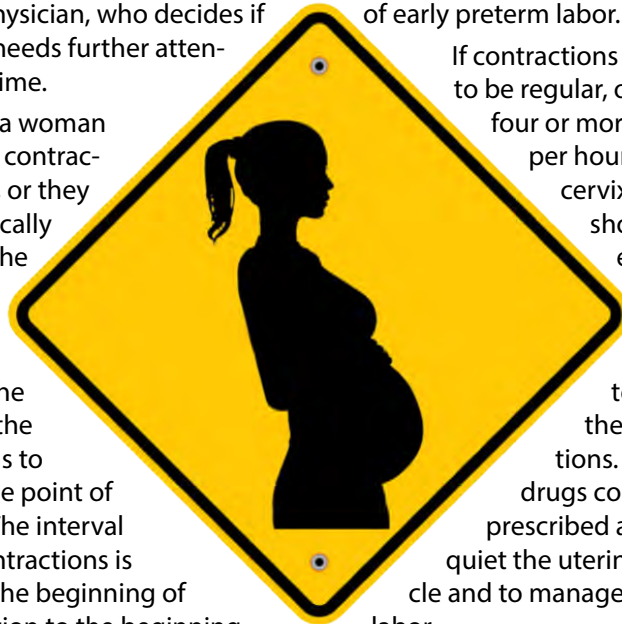
ruptured, the medical team has the best chance of forestalling delivery. Bedrest and increased fluid intake can sometimes stop the progression of early preterm labor.

If contractions continue to be regular, occurring four or more times per hour, and the cervix begins to show changes, medication is usually indicated to manage the contractions. There are drugs commonly prescribed and used to quiet the uterine muscle and to manage preterm labor.

The statistics for preterm labor among women carrying multiples can be intimidating, but a woman can do much to weight the odds in her favor. A woman carrying twins or more need not—and should not—be afraid that she will deliver early. What she should do is educate herself about the potential problems, take good care of herself, and work closely with her obstetrician.

It does appear that a woman who monitors her labor has a greater chance of delivering near term, and the extra effort is surely worth it. Each day in nature's most perfect incubator—the womb—is a priceless gift from a mother to her unborn babies.

As early in pregnancy as possible, it is advisable for an expectant mother to consult her obstetrical caregiver about the signs of preterm labor. Also, it is helpful for her to discuss what to do if she has a concern or if she thinks she may be going into premature labor. She should find out if she should call her physician first or go immediately to the hospital's labor and delivery unit. ♥



# SUMMER TIPS FOR INFANT TWINS



## In the heat of the moment

New parents have lots of questions. How much? How long? How hot or cold? When it comes to choosing outfits or wrapping summer babies in lovely new blankets, it's sometimes difficult to know what qualifies as the right amount of clothing or protective covering. One of summer's colorful imprints can take the form of something that's not very pleasant for newborn multiples—heat rash.

It generally appears when babies are dressed too warmly. Small, red spots spread across the upper chest, back, neck and arms during periods of warm, humid weather. Heat rash is not serious and usually disappears when you uncover the affected area and expose it to the air. A tepid bath sometimes helps. Circulate the air in the room where your babies sleep. If the rash persists, call your pediatrician.

## Sunscreen and shades

The best protection against the damaging rays of the sun is full coverage. Look for a shady spot when outdoors and be sure to use a canopy on the stroller. Take an umbrella to the beach. Because infants and young children may be at increased risk for eye injury from the sun, choose hats with brims and—if you can get your twins to wear them—sunglasses that block at least 99% of the sun's rays. If you can't find a shady spot, the American Academy of Pediatrics now says it is safe to use a small amount of sunscreen on infants under 6-months of age. Cover those easily overlooked areas of the hands and top of the feet.







## The great outdoors

With the arrival of warmer temperatures, multiples under the age of one will begin exploring the great outdoors for the first time. Remember to exercise caution when placing your multiples in this new environment. Poisonous leaves and tiny insects can go right into little mouths. Twins, triplets, or more can safely play in a fenced backyard, or use a blanket, play pen or Exersaucers to safely set up baby boundaries. If your babies are fussy, the fresh air and sunshine alone are sometimes enough to put smiles on their faces—and yours!

## Protecting those pearly whites

When your multiples flash those precious, toothless grins, take it as an invitation to begin an oral hygiene routine. Following each feeding, you can wipe down their gums with a soft cloth. As teeth begin to appear, gently rub them with a damp piece of gauze in the morning and evening to help deter decay. A soft baby toothbrush is appropriate as more teeth come in, but don't introduce toothpaste until the age of three.



## No peaches 'cream here

Most new parents are surprised when their babies' skin isn't always picture perfect. Infant acne affects most babies between birth and 4-months. It is caused by a combination of their own oil glands adjusting to elements outside of the womb and from a remainder of mom's hormones still inside their little bodies. During the summer months, don't confuse this problem with heat rash, which can occur in older babies as well. Excess heat causes the skin to become red and blotchy. Infant acne is bumpy. Caregivers should not put lotion or soap on young babies' faces. Instead, use a cool, wet washcloth three times a day to wipe hot little cheeks, chins, necks and noses for both problems. ♥

# POTTY TRAINING IN PAIRS

... Let your twins lead the way

by R.C. Barajas

**A**s parents of multiples, we breathe a collective sigh of relief when our babies “settle.” They sleep through the night for the most part and begin to express their wants and needs somewhat verbally. In general, as some of the dust settles, they become a little more predictable.

They also start to show their true, individual colors in the battle of wills department, which brings us to the subject at hand — potty training multiples. An important thing to keep in mind as you approach the daunting task of separating your children from diapers is that in entering that battle of wills, you all lose. The bathroom is not a war zone, the diapers are not the enemy, and we cannot impose our timetable on our children. As parents, we undertake potty training to impart an essential social skill, not in order to exert our authority. When the children are physically and developmentally ready to learn that skill, they will do so. Reluctant children may have to be encouraged, frightened children may have to be reassured, but eventually, learn they will.

## RESPECT INDIVIDUAL READINESS

Unfortunately, there is no package deal in potty training multiples, and it is not cheaper or easier by the dozen. Each child has his or her own internal agenda, and what works for one eager child has no promise of having the least effect on more reticent siblings. Parents sometimes end up straddling the fence as one sibling finally dons the underwear and the other grips even tighter on to the diapers. Vicki Lansky, in the book *Toilet Training* cautions: “Concentrate on treating twins as individuals, not as a matched pair. Never compare the progress of one against the other. Don’t impose one child’s readiness on the other by comparing or blaming.”

Meg Hogan of McLean, Virginia, found that while Rachel, one of her fraternal twin girls, trained readily, Rebecca, generally the feistier of the two, resisted the whole process. Among the things that helped overcome the stum-

bling blocks were incentives such as candy (the old parents’ helper), videos, and the social pressure of school. But in the end, Meg reiterates an unwavering truth of potty training: when they are ready, they are ready. Readiness is really the key factor, and that readiness may strike your children at different times, reflecting their

unique personal-

ities. Says  
Betty  
Roth-  
bart  
in





*Multiple Blessings:* "Toilet training is a great time to reaffirm children's individuality."

### WHEN IS A CHILD READY?

Some families sail through the trials of potty training relatively unscathed, as did Janie Krag and her identical twin girls, Kelly and Alyssa, of Los Gatos, California. Reading books together helped to spark interest and curiosity, says Janie, but the truth is, the girls were ready and willing and Mom hit the ground running.

Katie Schwieder's identical twin boys Andrew and William from Atlanta, Georgia, were the third and fourth children in their family. "By that time," says Katie, "we were pretty low key about the



whole thing," Katie made sure not to introduce the potty until the boys were mature enough to move ahead. "Potty training is one of the first steps towards building self esteem," she believes. The boys did not compete, but rather cheered each other on with each success, and though one was dry at night well before the other, there was never any teasing or gloating.

Rosemary Kendall, Ph.D., a parenting instructor in Fairfax county, Virginia, lists some signs to watch for before beginning to potty train your children.

- The child can stay dry for several hours at a time.
- The child gives evidence when having a bowel movement.
- The child indicates interest in using the toilet or complains about being wet or soiled.
- The child uses and understands language.
- The child likes to be neat and tidy.
- The child likes to imitate adults.

Dr. Kendall also points out that there is certainly a cultural component to potty training that can affect the age at which parents consider their children ready. The average age for potty training in the US is 28 months. In much of the world it is not uncommon for a child of 2 or younger to be already proficient

on the potty. In the US, parents, educators and doctors emphasize the independence of the child, and so training does not begin until the child can take upon him or herself much of the responsibility for their own toilet learning. They learn to listen to their body's signals and to act upon them, rather than have an adult sit them on a toilet at regular, frequent intervals during the day.

The challenge in potty training multiples is not that we have more than one to train at a time, but in allowing each child to show us his or her own signs of readiness as the individuals they ultimately are. Although they share a birthday, it has little bearing on when their internal clocks are set to don that Lion King underwear. There may be an uneven few months with one child prancing around in the glow of newfound freedom, while the other waddles obviously along with serious "diaper bottom," but it is a small consequence for allowing our children to set the pace for this momentous development in their young lives.

Betty Rothbart reminds us, "Praise their efforts to try. Above all, express calm, unpressured confidence that each will learn this skill. "It will, in time, happen. The diapers will be left by the wayside, and those days of bags, wipes and paraphernalia will be just an everfading memory. Calling on our diplomacy, patience and parenting skills and our faith in our children, will set the tone for success. ♥"

# POTTY TRAINING NIGHTMARE

by Natasha Yates

**W**hen my daughter was two she came home from child care and announced, "I want to wear big girl panties like Julia." I thought, "I just gave birth to micro-preemies, who were both in the NICU. I don't have the energy to sink into potty training." Okay, I admit that was not the best parenting attitude, but I was tired. Our sons had Twin to Twin Transfusion Syndrome in-utero and were born at 29 weeks via emergency C-section. I would take Jessica to day care on my way to spend the day at the hospital with my boys. My husband would go to work and pick her up on his way home. We would eat dinner together, then he would go to the hospital and I would play and read to Jessica before her bedtime. I was pumping milk, my husband and I were very worried about the boys while trying to raise our two year old daughter, and I was tired.

I explained the deal to Jessica, "You can wear underwear but you have to go to the toilet before your wet yourself." Admittedly I really hoped the day care would do the bulk of "potty training" and she would wear pull-ups at home. I wasn't sure how to do this.

She said, "Mom, I want to wear panties all the time, at night too."

"Oh my word, what a mess this will be," I thought. I responded, "Okay, but first you have to go eight days in a row waking up with a dry pull-up."

We went shopping for underwear – an exciting event for my little girl. Boom – day two she had an accident and she was mortified. I explained, "This is normal, it is okay, it takes time."

"Julia doesn't have accidents!!" She exclaimed. The next eight days went by and the following morning Jessica woke me up by poking my arm and when my eyes opened, she was naked, holding up a dry pull-up and said, "Eight nights with a dry pull-up, I get to wear underwear tonight." So, peer pressure can be a good thing. This potty training turned out to be easy.

They say that it is easier to toilet train girls than boys, easier to train singletons than multiples, and preemies have a harder time of it than term babies. I don't know if that is true, but I had two, male, preemies that breezed through the twos with no interest in the toilet other than to see if toys would flush. I tried the little toilet chair in the bathroom, that didn't work. I tried the toilet seat cover to fit their little bottoms, that didn't last. I tried stickers, that didn't last long either. I let them choose underwear at the store. I pointed out their friends that wore underwear. They turned three, still not regularly using the toilet.

I asked advice of a child psychologist who suggested, "Get rid of the Pull-Ups — they are made too well. They need to feel the discomfort of wetting themselves to be motivated to use the toilet." That made sense. So, underwear it was. The house is carpeted, oh what a mess. The psychologist was right in that they did not like being wet; however, instead of using the toilet they would pee and then take off the dirty clothes and put fresh ones on leaving the dirty pants where they landed. They turned four.

One day at Target both boys were in the cart as I picked up items and placed them in the cart. As I placed a box of Pull-Ups underneath the cart Justin asked, "Can we get a toy?"

I said, "No, toys are not on our list."

Justin, "Tristan's mom gets him a toy when they go to Target."

Oh, he just pushed a button.

My exasperated response, "Tristan's mom is not spending 100s of dollars a year on Pull-Ups. Tristan wears underwear!"

David looked at his brother (he wasn't much of a talker). Justin scrunched his forehead and said, "You mean if we wear underwear we would have money to get a toy?"

"If you wore underwear we could afford to go on vacation!" I exclaimed.

Justin thought a minute as David looked back and forth from him to me. Justin said, "I would wear underwear for a toy." David's eyebrows went up in surprise.

I had a moment of hopefulness, "Uh, sure. But that means underwear all the time, all day, through the night, every night." Justin's eyes and mouth opened with excitement. "David, if we wear underwear we can get a toy!"

David said, "I want a donut."

Justin quickly responded, "A donut? A toy is better than a donut!"

David glared at his brother, "I want a donut."

I exclaimed, "Boys, boys, if you wear underwear all the time, I'll get you a toy and a donut. Are you willing to switch to underwear?"

Justin and David looked at each other, then me. Justin said, "Yes."

David said, "I need to go to the bathroom, RIGHT NOW."

I think I might have started running in Target. ♡



# your potty training experiences

Tips and tricks from the *real* experts. Submissions have been edited for length and clarity.

We started by 2yrs and one took to the potty immediately and the other did not. I never gave rewards but a ton of praise and excitement (singing, dancing, etc). Potty training is repetition and routine, so follow them around all day and any time they go potty make a big deal of excitement and praise.

— **RACHEL MARTINEZ**

We were told a couple things. For boys, get a box of cheerios and toss a few in the bowl for target practice. Our boys loved it. Make a game out of it. We also had a candy machine with M&M's in it. Every time they went they got a penny for a couple M&M's. Of course you could swap out for something they like.

— **CHAD SHUPE**

It's summer so when possible go nappy and clothing free and when they want to wee it will feel odd as no nappy. Usually they put their hand there and if quick to offer a potty and successful they soon learn if ready. One of my twins trained earlier than the other by six months.

— **SUE PHILIPS**

I put the potties in front of the bookcase, they sat without needing to go and looked at all their favourites until one of them produced something. Hyperbolic celebrations. Repeat twice daily.

— **VICTORIA WALLINGTON**

My boys were 4 when they were ready. I tried for months with no prevail. They had no interest at all and it ended up just being more stressful for everyone. I finally stepped back after almost a year and within 4-5 months they started wanting to use the potty themselves and were trained that week. When they are ready they will do it.

— **AMBER BIAS**

I have boy / girl twins. They each trained separately when they were ready. They each had their own seat and we would sit and read books. First with diapers on, then off. The problem is that diapers today are so absorbent that the kids don't feel wet. If they were wet then they'd be uncomfortable and want them off.

— **BRENDA KASMAN CAPTOL**

I made the mistake of trying to potty train my twins too early. I got it in to my head that they had to be trained by 3. But some children are just not ready. I would keep introducing the potty to them, let them watch you and older sibling using the toilet etc and keep being really relaxed about it all and it will happen.

— **MICHELLE PETERS**

I had one basically train herself. She was ready. Wore the pull ups for a week, no accidents, and was done. The other, lots of accidents, lots of hits and misses, eventually she got there.

— **ANGELA MAXWELL**

Potty prizes! I got a sheet of stickers and they got one if they went on the potty. Changed everything! They would just say they had to go to get the sticker.

— **KATIE MCCOOL**

Don't try to train them together. Start with the twin who seems more receptive. That is what worked for me. My son was always a few months ahead of my daughter with milestones.

— **MARIE HARRINGTON**

Put the potty outside on a nice day and wait, soon as they start to wee or poo, then coax them onto the potty with food. If they miss just get a hose and wash away.

— **AARON COSY POWELL**

I let them run around naked outside so they become aware of their bodily functions. They are not potty trained, but they think it's funny to streak around the house.

— **GEORGE P. MURPHY JR.**



# getting ready for PRESCHOOL

by Chéla Wallace

**Y**ou did your research, talked to other parents of twins/multiples and found a great preschool for your children. It will be the first school experience for all of you, and you are filled with questions: "Are my children ready? What if they cry? What if I cry? What do I need to buy? Should my twins/multiples be in the same class? What if my children are the first in the world to not make it in preschool?"

All these questions and more go through most parents' minds... and everyone, including parents, survives. As you prepare for preschool, here are a few things to keep in mind:

- **Should the children be in the same class?** This concern is unique to parents of twins/multiples. Keeping your children together is usually a good idea, as it can make separation from the parent easier. After the children settle in, they often



*“As parents, we often think we can talk away children’s anxiety, when in reality it only makes them more anxious. Always answer their questions in a positive way and reiterate that school will be fun.”*


gravitate to the activities they enjoy most and don’t stay together the entire class time. As the year goes by, the teacher can help the children find their own way by seating them apart and by directing them into different play areas.

- **Arrange some playdates with friends.** This will help the children adjust to being apart from you. Start with a very short time, as little as 15 minutes (using a kitchen timer to make this more concrete). Even if they cry, leave with a kiss and a smile. The quick return will help them learn you always come back.
- **If you can, visit the preschool, meet the staff and ask to look around.** At the least, drive by the school, point it out and talk about the coming year. This helps create a sense of ownership for the children. Find out the teacher’s name and talk about the things your children will be doing in class: “Teacher Susan will have so many fun things for you to do when you go to school: Play-Doh, painting and singing lots of songs.”
- **Get a list of things your children need for school and go shopping together.** Kids love to help pick out their school supplies, especially their backpacks (and lunch boxes, if needed). Your children will feel they have a hand in getting ready for their big adventure!
- **Be sure your children are up-to-date on immunizations.** Most states require this for all preschoolers.
- **Make a contact list.** With their permission, make a list of the names and phone numbers of friends and relatives whom your children know and whom the school can contact in

case of an emergency or if you are delayed and need someone else to pick up your children.

- **If your children get upset when you talk about school, just let it go.** As parents, we often think we can talk away children’s anxiety, when in reality it only makes them more anxious. Always answer their questions in a positive way and reiterate that school will be fun. If you are anxious about school, your children will pick up on your stress.
- **It is important to remind your children that parents don’t go to school.** Give your children some examples of things you will be doing when they are at school, such as going to the store to buy groceries. Also, talk about where other members of the family go during the day (to work or school).
- **If English is not generally spoken at home, now is a good time to start.** Having their home language is very important, but your children will feel more comfortable at school if they hear you using the language their teacher uses.
- **The big day finally arrives.** When dropping your children off at school, always walk them into class; do not carry them. Get your children seated and involved in an activity, and then leave with a smile. It will make their day go smoother. Staying doesn’t make it easier for children: the longer you stay, the longer they think you will stay. It also gives children the message that you don’t feel they are safe. Remind your children the teacher will take good care of them and that you will return soon.

It generally takes about three weeks for children to get comfortable with the new environment and new teachers. Remember, separation anxiety is very normal and most children soon ease into the new schedule.

At the beginning of the school year, you’ll wonder how to fill all your newfound free time. By winter break, you’ll wonder why preschool is so short! As we all know, the childhood years fly by too fast. Enjoy it because before you know it, you’ll be applying to colleges! 

# WHEN YOUR TWINS DON'T GET ALONG

by Michelle LaRowe

**“M**ommy he hit me!”  
“But she started it!”  
The sound of squabbling in stereo is enough to make you pull out your hair. How can two people who shared (and survived!) the tight space in your womb for nearly nine months fail to survive nine minutes without being at each other’s throats? And yet the fights sometimes seem endless, in the space of your living room, your kitchen, everywhere.

Anyone with twins knows: Beyond age and appearance, virtually nothing is identical about them. You’ve probably also discovered that whoever said “Parents of twins have it easy, because their kids come with a built-in playmate” obviously doesn’t know what they’re talking about.

Sibling rivalry is a family fact of life. Throw twins or triplets into the mix, and the intensity increases exponentially.

Simply stated, sibling rivalry is the competition to be the favorite child. It’s a battle for the love, attention and affection of one or both parents. It’s a competition to be the chosen child—the one loved most by parents they least want to share.

Sibling rivalry has existed as long as families have. Even the Bible contains accounts of Jacob’s and Esau’s twin troubles.

So rather than taking on the

impossible task of making your home a rivalry-free zone, you may be better off acting to “manage” normal sibling rivalry between your twins.

**DO** Remember your twins are individuals. Although they may share the same sex, age, and developmental stages, their personalities and temperaments are wonderfully unique. Remember personality-wise, your twins are no more alike than any other siblings.

**DO** Call them by their names. Using each twin’s name and encouraging others to do the same rather than addressing them as a unit (“the twins,” “the boys,” “the girls”) allows them the freedom to develop their own personalities and interests to be comfortable in their own individual skins.

**DO** Watch the wardrobe. Dress them similarly if you want to, but avoid making them look identical. And if they request to dress completely differently, say ok!

**DO** Allow for differences. Encourage the differences you see in each twin. Foster their distinctive interests and let them know they are loved for who they are.

**DO** Let them say “It’s mine.” Allowing each child to have some

objects, spaces and friends of his own helps each to understand how to exist outside of the irreplaceable twin unit. Every person alive needs something that they don’t have to share.

**DO** Encourage alone-time. Facilitate short periods apart for times of self-discovery.

**DO** Spend one-on-one time with each twin. Be proactive in spending time with each child. Bathtime and reading-time are great times in which to have short, meaningful one-on-one time.

**DO** Let them work it out. Allowing your twins to work out their conflicts alone will prevent you from becoming manipulated into taking sides or placing blame when you haven’t got all the details. If an argument escalates into physical violence, separate them immediately, then investigate when things have cooled.

**DO** Have realistic expectations. Siblings don’t always get along. Don’t force your twins to play together if they need time apart—we all do!

**DO** Give positive purposeful praise. Point out each child’s strengths and praise them when they are interacting well together.





**DO** Set ground rules for behavior. Kids need a clear set of rules and expectations for how to treat each other. No hitting. No biting. No teasing. No name-calling. These are the foundations of your twins' relationship rules. Defining acceptable and unacceptable behaviors promotes consistency in discipline.

**DO** Spend time together as a family. This stresses the importance of unity and helps advance a team spirit.

**DO** Develop a system for deciding on most-wanted privileges. Have a plan of action in place for determining who gets to push the elevator button, or who gets to sit on the favored side of the car. This will head off heated battles. Keep a coin handy for flipping, or keep track of who got to choose last. It'll settle most disputes.

**DO** Let each twin express her/his feelings. Encourage each twin to communicate clearly, and insist the cotwin listen quietly. Helping your twins find the words to express their emotions gives each a sense of control. Be sure to validate each one's feelings without validating negative behavior. Responding, "I know you are frustrated, but hands aren't for hitting," empowers the child without condoning the behavior.

**DO** Model good behavior. You reap what you sow when it comes to childhood behaviors. Model positive interactions with your spouse and your twins, and you'll be surprised how

quickly it is mirrored.

**DO** Be fair. Hold each twin accountable for the same rules and regulations. Each should experience the same consequences for similar infractions.

**DO** Divert playtime battles. Use a timer to decide how long each twin gets to play with the favorite toy.

**DON'T** Compare your twins with each other. How you compare your twins sets the stage for how they will compare themselves to each other and to outsiders. These seemingly innocent comparisons are at the root of destructive sibling rivalry.

**DON'T** Use competition to motivate. A heightened sense of natural competition already exists between twins and needn't be enlarged. For example, have

them race against a timer rather than each other when picking up toys.

**DON'T** Try to do everything equally. If you treat your twins differently it's okay! They are different people. Meeting each child's unique needs is what is important. Just because Sean wore his shoes out and got a new pair doesn't mean Jane has to have new ones too, if hers are perfectly fine.

**DON'T** Pay attention to who started it. It takes two to quarrel. Hold your twins accountable for their actions.

**DON'T** Label your kids. Be careful not to mold your twins with your words. Shy. Outgoing. Bossy. Meek. Loving. Sensitive. Aloof. Stand-offish. Smart. Not-so-smart. Athletic. Uncoordinated. Labels last a lifetime. Your twins will either live up or live down to your expectations.







# TWIN DISCRIMINATION

An old problem with a new label

**F**irst, 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

by **Lauren Kramer**

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. ♡

#### HOW DO YOU DRESS YOUR TWINS?

Always the same	40%
Same on special occasions	12%
Same outfit, different colors	43%
Never the same	12%

\*Taken from TWINS reader feedback

# All I really needed to know I learned at

# KINDERGARTEN

## registration

by Amy Barrese Archer

**W**hen I brought my identical twin girls home from the hospital five years ago, my mind could not comprehend the madness that awaited me. Two of everything: two diaper changes, two midnight feedings, two missed naps, two cranky babies, two bottles to be warmed, two sets of clothes to be washed, two mouths whining, four clumsy feet walking (stumbling), two temper tantrums, everything was amplified, intensified, multiplied. But for as hard as all of that was, and believe me it was difficult, my biggest challenge has come many years later: Kindergarten.

I am a working mother. I don't work a typical nine to five job, but I did attend graduate school for my MFA in Creative Writing while my girls were only a year and a half old, and I have been launching a writing and teaching career over the past four years. Because of this, my girls have seen the inside of a daycare center, two of them in fact, and while leaving them in daycare a few days a week was difficult, one thing always left me with a shred of comfort: they had each other. In my mind I imagined that if one was scared, the other would be there to sooth and protect her, and vice versa. This is one of the advantages of having twins, the knowledge that when you are not with them, they can take on the world as a team.

But that comfort in which I had allowed myself to bask for so long, through two years of daycare and one year of preschool, came to a screeching halt on a cold morning in March, otherwise known as Kindergarten Registration Day. I had assumed that my life, the boat on which I was steering us, would remain on course. I had assumed that my girls would take on Kindergarten as they had everything else: side by side. Then I was met with our school's principal and her "policy." Apparently, the district in which I live has an official, unofficial, policy that twins are to be separated in Kindergarten.

This blew my world apart. All I could see in front of me was a world of separate and varying tasks: homework, in-class parties, out-of-class birthday parties, parent-teacher conferences, science projects, show and tell days, and field trips, just to name a few. I imagined a world with two magnetic refrigerator calendars, each

covered with miles of magic-markered things to remember. It was like I was being thrust backwards into that beginning stage of twinsanity again. All of the progress I had made, the routines I had established, the ease I had managed to create, gone.

Then, one day it hit me. Well, it didn't exactly hit me, as it was thrown at me by a good friend who has two children (not twins). After an hour of listening to me whine about the upcoming separation and subsequent workload I would be straddled with, she simply said, "Welcome to our world, this is what it's like having two children." But wait, I don't have two children, I thought to myself, I have twins! That's different... isn't it? Then it occurred to me: I have been raising my girls as twins, not siblings. There is a big difference, a wide gap between those two labels, and I had never noticed it before.

My first instinct was to fight. I called the principal and immediately voiced my concern. She went on to tell me, in a very authoritarian tone, that she had been an educator for twenty-eight years, and that during that time, she has separated many twins and all of them have not only survived, but thrived. But you have not been a mother of twins for one day, not one single day, I wanted to shout. I kept my cool and tried a different approach. I gathered support from some online sources and visited with my twins' current teacher who assured me that, yes, my daughters work independently of one another. Great! I thought. There was no way I could be turned away now! I had all of the proof and statistics I needed, and with that, I called and scheduled another meeting with the principal. Then, a week later, something happened: a birthday party.

It was a Friday night and a little girl named Lily was celebrating her fifth birthday. My twins were invited, so of course I found myself there, commiserating with the other preschool moms about the frequency of these birthday parties, when I noticed something. This was really





the first time I was observing my girls in their school environment, and what I saw saddened me. All of their classmates, running, bouncing, and laughing together, while my twins played alone in a blow-up jungle. Later, at cake time, one refused to stand near the birthday girl and sing if the other wasn't right next to her.

Oh no. My twins were lost in one another. Then, like a river, all of these little moments: my girls sequestered in the corners of birthday parties, refusing to include friends in play dates, whispering to one another instead of joining the group, combined to create a current that washed over me and changed everything. My girls needed separation. I was the one who feared it, not them. Later that night when I asked how they felt about being in different classrooms, they were excited at the thought. Less fighting at home, my husband pointed out. Maybe this could be a good thing!

I spent hours looking for research and the most practical and conclusive research I came across was from The Parents of Multiple Births Association, Inc., of Canada, which provides a list of possible circumstances to be considered when making a decision about separation. The organization suggests asking yourself one general question: By five years old, are each of the twins capable of initiating and maintaining satisfying relationships with nonsibling peers? In other words, do they have friendships outside of one another? The answer for my girls was no. That's a problem.

Some other questions to consider are:

Do classmates constantly compare the twins? Which may lead to feelings of negativity in one over the other.

Are your twins causing a disruption, or not paying attention to the teacher when they are together?

In the case of boy-girl twins, is the female "over-mothering" the male?

Is one twin always helping the other? This could lead to social and academic dependency.

Are other students and/or the teacher constantly mixing identical twins up?

Your answers to these questions will determine which choice is right for your children. Each set of twins is different and has a unique dynamic. In the end, my girls will be going to separate Kindergarten classes in the fall. But that conclusion was one I had to come to on my own. The frustration I felt and many twin moms feel, is that the school should not have the last vote in this very critical decision. Unless you've parented twins, you have no idea how big these seemingly small issues can become.

Above all else remember this: listen to your children, both verbally and nonverbally, and trust your gut. Remember those days of infancy, when problems seemed to loom so large? You knew what to do then, and you'll figure it out this time, too. You're a parent of twins, after all, you can do anything... remember? ♡







# TWO TWINS

## TWO DIFFERENT GRADES

**What do you do  
when only one twin  
struggles?**

by Christina Baglivi Tinglof



**E**ach year parents of twins grapple with the question of whether they should separate their kindergarten-bound twins or keep the pair together. As hard as that decision is for some, just imagine if that question suddenly became, "Should we hold just one child back for another year?"

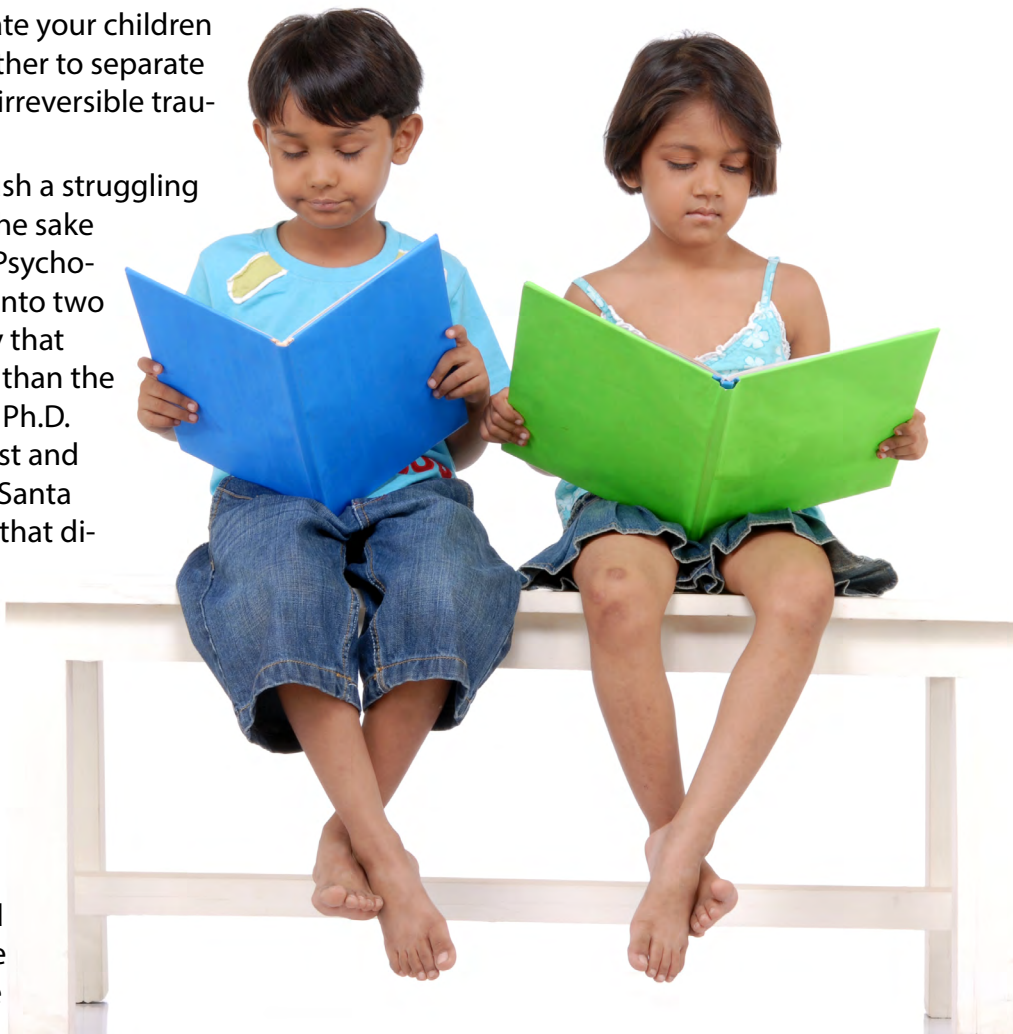
If one twin is struggling academically or socially in preschool (or even kindergarten) while his co-twin is right on target, the decision of what to do can be agonizing. It's a predicament that Melissa Schroeder of Ft. Lauderdale, Florida knows firsthand. Five-year-old son Michael lags socially behind his twin sister Madison and still struggles with speech. "Madison's very interested in learning but Michael gets more frustrated," Schroeder says. "He's very intelligent but his skills are scattered." Yet Schroeder and her husband never considered holding Michael back in preschool while promoting Madison to kindergarten. "It's one thing to separate your children by classroom but it's quite another to separate twins by grade. It would be an irreversible trauma."

But is it fair or prudent to push a struggling preschool twin ahead just for the sake of preserving the twin bond? "Psychologically, if you separate twins into two different grades, there's no way that one's not going to feel smarter than the other one," says Melissa Mullin, Ph.D. and an educational psychologist and director of the K & M Center in Santa Monica, California, an institute that diagnoses and remediates learning disabilities. "There's no way around that." Although Dr. Mullin believes that parents should do everything they can to keep their twins in the same grade, even if that means holding both back in preschool or kindergarten, she cautions that parents first need to understand the type and the degree of the problem that the struggling twin faces.

## DIAGNOSING THE LEARNING PROBLEM

The first order of business for parents is to get their child tested and assessed to find out if the trouble is a developmental delay or a learning disability. The difference between the two, Dr. Mullin explains, is significant when deciding what to do. "The problem is determining if this is a long-term difficulty or a catch-up process," she says.

On the one hand, a developmental delay is a lifelong difference in learning capacity and learning ease. This is a child who would benefit from a special class or a special school specifically for children with learning issues. Furthermore, if a twin has a developmental delay, it is clear that his learning needs will be different than that of his co-twin. If a child is temporarily lagging behind, however, that is not called a developmental delay. For instance, if a twin is delayed in lan-



guage but his speech is developing in the right sequence just at a slower than normal pace, more than likely it's not a developmental delay. With proper and timely therapy, most twins with delayed speech will catch up.

On the other hand, if a twin has a learning disability and his IQ is in the average or above average range, you're talking about only a slight difference in ability. This is when parents need to consider the emotional impact of holding one child back. "The studies on children with learning disabilities show that holding a child back is not the answer, intervention is," Dr. Mullin says. "Once the learning issue is addressed and with the correct intervention, the child should be able to function in the classroom without being held back."

A correct diagnoses and subsequent remediation made all the difference for Sonia Fox's twin son John. When teachers told the Falcon, Colorado mom that she should consider holding her then first grader back a year because he struggled with reading, Fox looked into her son's learning issue on her own. "John couldn't control his eye movements. I watched him as we would try to read and noticed he couldn't keep his eyes on the page," she says. "He'd get lost and then frustrated and didn't want to continue reading." John was finally diagnosed in second grade with a tracking and convergence deficiency and started intense visual therapy. Today in third grade, he's reading just a few months behind grade level. "It's been a hard slog to get to this point," says Fox, "My son is a very sensitive and I feel the damage to his self esteem of repeating would have been great."

### STAYING TOGETHER WHILE BEING APART

Since most kindergarten classes are more developmentally challenging these days, another alternative is to look at two different

schools rather than two different grades. "Some schools are easier, and some are harder," Dr. Mullin explains. For a twin with delays, for example, choose a school that's more developmentally progressive, one that will be a bit gentler in its approach to teaching and one that will let your twin develop at his own rate. For the twin who is on par for her grade level, the local elementary school may be a good fit. "Since you have two different types of learners, match each child with the right school."

That's the approach that Lori Lynch of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania took with her six-year-old fraternal twin boys, Joey and Johnny. When April of their kindergarten year rolled around, it was recommended that Joey repeat while co-twin Johnny was ready to advance to first grade. Although it didn't come as a shock, the Lynches were nonetheless disappointed. "Separating them meant one would be able to join Cub Scouts a year earlier, one could make their religious sacraments a year earlier, and one would be college hunting a year earlier," Lynch says.

They told the school district that splitting the boys was not an option. Instead, both boys would repeat kindergarten but in different schools and in different classroom settings—Joey in a more nurturing pre-K program and Johnny in a more challenging one. "After much debate and many meetings, both will be starting first grade together next year," she adds.

For Dee Whisnant's boy-girl twins, five-and-a-half-year-old Scarlet and Perry, the separate-but-together track began back in preschool. Both had delays in speech, explains the Salisbury, North Carolina mom, but Perry's was more challenging. After attending different preschool classes, the Whisnant twins are now in different kindergarten environments as well—Scarlet is in a traditional class but Perry attends a school that promotes academics through communication and social skills. "Until and if he is able to be mainstreamed, he will be different than his sister," she says. "He's come a long way since starting this year but has a long way to go, too."







## THE GIFT OF TIME

If parents recognize now that one or both of their twins is struggling in preschool, simply give them the gift of time by holding both twins back for one more year. This is especially helpful for twins with a late summer or fall birthday, and even more important for premie twins whose true age should be based on their due date, not their birthday. "Most twins who are developmentally behind will always be behind—they'll be late talkers, late walkers. So those children would probably benefit from being held back because you are giving them more developmental time to catch up," Dr. Mullin explains. If your twins are not five by September 1st, hold them back in preschool.

But what if twins differ? What if one's on target while her co-twin is not? Is that fair to the developmentally ready twin? "How is it unfair to give

your child the advantage of being the strongest academically, the most developed in the classroom?" she asks. "Sure, she may be done with her work quicker, but she can pull out a book and read while she's waiting. Compare that to being the youngest in the class, always stressed out, always a step behind, and the last to develop especially when it comes to motor skills."

By the time middle schools rolls around, age doesn't matter. What's more important is if a child is self-confident and can get along well with others. "I've never heard any parents say they were sorry that they held their children back in preschool or kindergarten," says Dr. Mullin, "but I've often heard parents with children going into middle school wishing they had held them back earlier so that their kids could have had that extra developmental time." ♡

by Patricia Malstrom



good  
twin  
BAD  
TWIN

## Crushing the classic myth

**M**y first encounter with the myth that twins come packaged as a pair — one good and one bad — came more than 20 years ago in my neighborhood supermarket. As I rolled a grocery cart carrying my 10-month-old twin daughters past a woman standing in front of the apple bin, she called after us, “Which one is the good one and which one is the bad one?” Speechless, I hurried our cart into the canned goods aisle. There I caught my breath, smiled at my two — who were busy untying each other’s shoelaces — and wondered how anyone could ask such a question.

Twins are up against the human penchant for comparing, contrasting and labeling. Since they are born a “matched set” so to speak, they are often appropriated as symbols of the good and bad in all of us. Ancient myths and modern movies are peopled with twins made to represent polar opposites. A well-known example is the Old Testament story about the twins, Jacob and Esau. Their mother, Rebecca, fueled a rivalry between them with far-reaching consequences because she favored the sensitive and cultivated Jacob over his more impulsive twin Esau.

Unfortunately, most people have more familiarity with twin myths than with living, breathing twins, who are, after all, just two little kids. As one

mother of adult twin sons put it, “I was amazed at how good both my twins were. From an early age there was so much caring and compassion between them. If I offered one a cookie, he wouldn’t take it until he made sure there was a cookie for his brother, too. I tried, but could never seem to teach my singleborn kids to be as thoughtful of each other.” She says she protected her boys from intrusive public scrutiny and twin myths while they were growing up by giving them distinctly different names. She never dressed them alike, and avoided any other emphasis on their twinship. Today they are both professional musicians and best friends.

We parents have the job of ensuring that our multiples have a chance to fulfill themselves, to grow up to develop their individual potentials — those that are the same and those that are different. To do that we need to rid ourselves of any myths lurking in the back of our own minds and, unlike the biblical Rebecca, resist any impulse we might have to favor one over the other.

Susie Robertson, president of her local twins club, says that she is surprised by the number of members who say one of their newborn twins is easy-going and one is fussy. The mothers tell her that it’s very hard to fall in love with the baby



who needs special handling. They worry that they will bond only with the easy-going child. She reassures them that this too shall pass. As babies mature, colic and fussing fade away, mom's energy picks up and life in the hurricane becomes more manageable. It may take a bit longer, but love will grow between mom and dad and all of the kids.

While few parents believe the myth of a good twin-bad twin split, some fall into the trap of contrasting their twins' personality traits and abilities — easy and difficult, pretty and smart. Of course, there are times when any parent becomes disenchanted with one over the other — a colicky baby is no picnic; nor is a cranky, rebellious toddler. Wise parents keep these feelings to themselves. When they speak of differences between their twin children, they translate them into positives and avoid negative labels. "Amy has so much energy. Lila stays calm no matter what," or "Harold is a planner. Todd's the engineer."

Some parents have to go to bat for their babies right from the start. A mother of preemies told me that when her own mother saw the larger of her tiny newborn grandsons for the first time, she declared, "This one's a bruiser. He's going to beat up the little one." At that the young mom burst into tears and told her mother, "Don't you ever speak that way again." Fortunately, grandmother learned quickly and has cooperated ever since.

Within the family, parents can control their own behavior and perhaps sway the relatives. But there's no easy way to protect our multiples from inappropriate questions and comments of their classmates, teachers, coaches and strangers. The best defense is to demonstrate a positive attitude about twinship and about any differences between your children.

A mother of 12-year-old boys told me that friends of their family rank the boys according to their own preferences. For example, their sporting friends rate her athletic son higher than his left-handed twin who loves music. Her twins and their classmates have a hard time understanding that different does not mean good and bad. She

tells them over and over that their differences are OK. They are two separate people with different talents. Whenever one of her boys has a particularly hard time, she takes a step back and thinks as if she were on a job — to help each develop their own self-esteem. And she makes sure that the boys' teachers and coaches understand each boy's special talents, too. Her boys may not understand everything their mother tells them now, but her words and actions demonstrate a model they can use when they encounter the myth on their own.

Perhaps you and your family will never experience a version of this myth, but if you do, be ready with a positive attitude. If I could roll back the clock, I know now just what I would say to that woman in the supermarket, "Oh these are both good girls!" ♡



## WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Clear your head of myths.
- Avoid labeling the children.
- Teach them that they are neither carbon copies nor opposites.
- Encourage each child to develop his or her strengths, same or different.
- Disapprove of bad behavior, but not the child.
- Speak up for the children when necessary.
- Praise them when they stick up for each other.
- Find help if you feel overwhelmed.

# Twin safety & the big yellow bus

**R**iding the school bus can be a new and exciting experience for many children, and if your twins are heading off to school this fall, you should know some important safety tips when riding that big yellow bus. In most cases, it's the first time your twins have traveled on their own, away from the watchful eyes of their parents. That's good because it helps your twins gain a sense of independence as they learn to act safely and responsibly. To make their trip as safe as possible, read more about school-bus safety — and teach your children, too.

## **SCHOOL BUSES ARE SAFER THAN YOUR CAR**

- School buses are an extremely safe form of transportation, about 30 times safer than passenger cars. However, accidents do happen. According to a 2006 study by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the majority of accidents occur outside the bus, where children can be struck by the bus or motorists illegally passing the bus.

**THE DANGER ZONE** - All school buses are surrounded by a ten-foot area known as the Danger Zone. In this area, it can be difficult for the driver to see anything, especially small children. The most dangerous parts of the Danger Zone are immediately in front of the bus and from in front of the rear wheels back to the rear of the bus. Multiple side-view and crossover mirrors, flatnosed buses and crossing control arms all help increase the driver's field of vision and add to the safety of the children. Crossing-control arms are 6-foot gates, attached to the front of the bus, that are designed to keep children far enough in front of the bus for them to be seen by the driver while they cross the street. The most effective safety measure, however, is for you to teach your twins how to avoid the Danger Zone.

**LET THE DRIVER DRIVE** - School-bus drivers are trained professionals with a very demanding task. The driver must pay attention to constantly changing traffic conditions, the children on the bus, the children entering and exiting the bus at each bus stop, and the schedule the bus is on. Teach your twins to behave responsibly on the bus to help make the ride safer.

**GIVE KIDS A BREAK!** - In your own vehicle, recognize YOUR responsibility when you approach a stopped school bus: Come to a complete stop, watch for children near the road, and don't pass the bus while it's stopped.

**PLAN FOR WHEN YOU'RE NOT THERE** - You or a

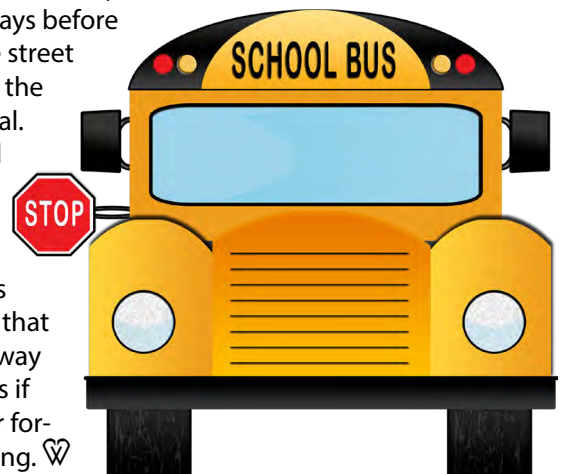
caregiver should be at the bus stop or at home when your twins get off the bus. If that's not possible, make sure they know exactly what to do — continue straight home, wait for your call, go to a neighbor's house, or whatever you've arranged for them beforehand. And once again, be sure your twins understand to whom they should and shouldn't talk with when they're on their own.

**TEACH YOUR TWINS WELL** - If your twins are new to riding the bus, or if you're not sure they know the safety rules discussed in the article, walk them through the steps. Teach them both how to get to and from the bus stop as well as on and off the bus; also explain what's expected of them as they ride the school bus.

**WAITING FOR THE BUS** - Have your twins arrive at the bus stop on time and stand well away from the curb. Wait for the bus to come to a complete stop before boarding and don't crowd your friends getting on or off the bus; board and exit one at a time. Never play or stand in the aisles; find a seat and sit down.

**RIDING THE BUS** - Make sure your twins stay in their seats and that they don't stick anything out the windows. Never, ever throw things in the bus and talking quietly with their friends instead of screaming and making noise is much safer. Children need to listen to the bus driver and bus monitor; follow their directions.

**GETTING ON, OFF, AND AROUND THE BUS** - Avoid the Danger Zone, because it's difficult for the driver to see your twins in this area. Take 10 giant steps beyond the front bumper of the bus before they turn to cross the street. This lets the driver maintain eye contact with them while they cross. They also need to look both ways before crossing the street and wait for the driver's signal. They should NEVER cross the street behind the bus and be sure that they keep away from the bus if they drop or forget something. ♡





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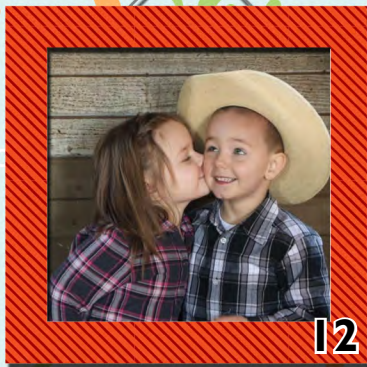
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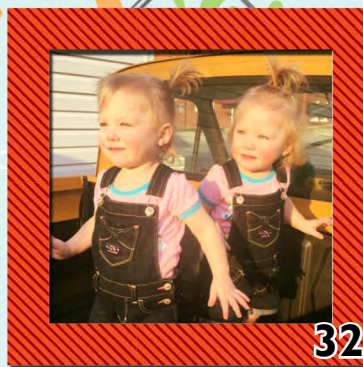
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