

Parenting Teens & Young Adult Multiples

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This chapter did not make it into Keys to Parenting Multiples, as the revision was already over the word requested word count. For those with older multiples, I hope you find it helpful...

Being a member of a set of multiple-birth children continues to influence the development of the individuals within the set throughout their lives. Each multiple is an individual yet also something else or something more. Each multiple may increasingly accentuate individual expression, but the sense of "belonging" to something special remains.

Adolescence

The exaggerated physical and emotional growth and development during the preteen and teenage years is associated with the search for individual identity. Is it any wonder that these years have a profound effect on the relationships between, or among, multiples? Even when the emphasis during multiples' childhood has been on individuality, there is no denying that each multiple still deals with her/his role as a member of a set during adolescence. The response of each multiple to this "task" will vary, which sometimes creates interesting challenges for parents!

- The resentment school-age multiples may sometimes feel about being part of a set can magnify and turn into issues adolescents "hate" about being a twin, triplet, quad or quint. Adolescence tends to be a time of extremes in terms of dress, hair, mannerisms and so on, and multiples are likely to take strong steps to stress individual identity by going to opposite extremes.
- Expect multiples, especially those of the same gender, and identical ones in particular, to choose different hairstyles or hair colors and different, but current, looks in clothing.
- A multiple who is often called "twin" or "hey, you" because of others' uncertainty as to "which is which," may develop a unique, and sometimes less than polite, method of correction.
- Each may go out of his or her way to destroy others' stereotypical ideas about multiples.
- Competitive multiples may find new ways to determine which one is "better" but others avoid competition all together.
- Mother Nature timed puberty so that the average female enters into it, and is affected by its physical changes, about two years before the average male. Heredity determines the timing of puberty's physical changes for the individual, and the timing may vary by several years among classmates of the same age and gender.
- The physical changes of puberty typically affect identical (monozygotic) multiples at about the same time.
- The timing of puberty for same-sex fraternal (dizygotic) multiples may be similar or vary by years, depending on the genes each inherited for the puberty body clock.
- For opposite-sex multiples, the timing of puberty is likely to vary by years and, statistically, the girl(s) will enter it earlier than her brother(s). However, for any given set, a girl could be "late normal" and her brother "early normal," leading to puberty for both at about the same time. Nature does not consult parents, but parents are likely to find there are both advantages and disadvantages whether multiples hit puberty at the same or somewhat different times.

- The hormonal influences on growth and mood often are intensified when multiples go through puberty at the same time!
- When the obvious changes of puberty occur for one multiples long before the other(s), it may be difficult for all involved. Puberty results not only in physical change; a child's interests also change. When one of same-sex multiples goes through puberty before the other(s) and that child's interests shift, the twin-twin relationship changes as well. Sometimes that impact continues long after each has moved through puberty.
- One of a competitive, same-sex fraternal set may feel "left behind" if the physical development of puberty gives the other a physical edge.
- The earlier onset of puberty in girls may retrigger, or intensify, the complaint of the "bossy" sister voiced by some boys in opposite-sex sets. Just as their sisters were more likely to have developed earlier verbal skills as toddlers or preschoolers, earlier puberty is likely to affect the "balance of power" within the twin-twin relationship for a time.

Adolescents say they want to be treated fairly, but multiples also want to be treated equally. This can create interesting challenges when developing "house rules" for multiple teens, since the timing of puberty may mean one is ready for certain experiences or privileges before the other(s). Parents must trust the "educated instinct" they have developed about each child to decide when to let one multiple participate in something new when the other(s) may not.

Compounding the issue is that the less-ready multiple(s) is unlikely to understand the reason she/he must wait when another is allowed to do something. Be prepared for protests! However, dealing with protests should not influence the parents' decisions.

- Statistically, male teens are likelier to engage in more risk-taking behaviors, so the girl(s) in a set may sometimes be ready for certain experiences or activities that carry some potential for engaging in risky behavior before the boy(s). (Depending on the activity, there may be times when parents should permit neither to participate.) Again, the prospect of protests by one or more should never interfere with parental decision making.
- When parents base permission to participate in certain experiences or to allow specific privileges only upon achievement of some arbitrary level, such as completion of certain schoolwork or the consistent demonstration of certain behaviors, then the criteria should be applied to each multiple in the same way. If only one reaches the predetermined goal, then only one earns the stated privilege. If all reach it, all gain the privilege. (Do not implement this strategy unless prepared to adhere to the predetermined agreement, whether one or all multiples achieves the goal.)
- There may be instances when a parent chooses to negotiate with an individual multiple regarding participation in an experience or for the granting of a privilege. Then the goal to be achieved, or the behavior that must precede a privilege, is agreed upon between the parents and the one teen.
- In many areas, multiples have an opportunity to attend different high schools during their teen years, and many multiples choose different colleges.
- The teens who said they hated being one of multiples before going to different schools may find they miss the celebrity of being recognized as one of twins, triplets, etc. when they attend different schools.
- Build extra money into the budget for long-distance calls when a large number of miles separate

multiples' schools. Most multiples say they talk to a co-multiple often.

- It is not unusual for multiples to transfer schools so that all attend the same one, although few admit the transfer was related to moving closer to the other(s).

Adulthood

One would think the parenting issues focusing on multiples would have resolved by the time they become adults, and most such issues have done so. Still, adult multiples sometimes present parents with concerns unique to the situation.

Several years ago, a radio call-in show featured the author of a new book for parents of twins. Of the incoming calls, most were from mothers with twins between the ages of 25 and 45 years. The mothers of these adults worried that their twins' relationship was either too close or not close enough! The author wisely suggested it was time for each of these mothers to stop trying to influence the relationship between the twins and concentrate on the relationships she had with each of her adult children.

- Although there may be occasions when it is appropriate to intervene, the relationship between/ among multiples belongs to them and each is likely to ignore or become angry when a parent offers unsolicited advice.
- When the relationship between adult multiples seems to be distant, it may be related to one or another's current need to grow as an individual. Multiples with extremely different personalities may not have all that much in common. Each probably has a busy life of his/her own.
- Fortunately, multiples often have the kind of bond that allows them to instantly reconnect and pick up where they left off no matter how long it has been since they last spoke together.

Adult partners of multiples will be happier if they can develop an appreciation for the bond between/ among the members of the set. Some researchers have found the partners of multiples often dislike the other multiple(s) whether multiples are identical or fraternal. Obviously, it would be unusual, and undesirable, for someone to feel the same for both/all multiples. Parents of identical multiples certainly know how different each truly is even if the public does not. However, partners may have difficulty understanding the strength of the bond many multiples share. Some partners feel jealous of the multiple-multiple relationship, which, if not dealt with, may have an unnecessarily negative effect on the relationship between partners or that of the multiples.

Parents and Their Multiples

Multiples present parents with unique situations and challenges whatever their ages. As they grow into adulthood, the relationship they share with each other changes and belongs even more to them alone. Still, each multiple continues to need their parents' support, encouragement and the wisdom of experience.