

A Family For Every Child Matching Assistance



*"We should not be asking who this child belongs to,
but who belongs to this child."*

Maintaining Sibling Contact

Children in foster care are sometimes separated from their siblings. Reasons for separating siblings vary, and typically come down to the needs of a child and/or safety concerns. While everything should be done to keep children together, sometimes it just doesn't happen that way. If your child has a close relationship with his/her siblings, it will be up to you to help them maintain that connection.

The Sibling Bond

The relationship between siblings can be very strong. Siblings may serve as a child's first group of friends, and they often spend more time with each other than anyone else. Siblings teach each other life lessons, support each other, and in some cases, take care of each other's needs.

For children in foster care, sibling relationships can take on a whole new meaning. More often than not, one of the siblings in a group will act as the caretaker for his/her brothers and sisters if their parent is unable or unwilling to care of them. In many cases, an attachment to a sibling may



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Additional Information

Kirkland Views -
[Kirkland's Sibling House
Provides a New Focus for
Foster Care](#)

be the only secure attachment a child has when entering foster care. Research on the sibling bond has shown that having these close relationships can endorse resilience.

Sibling Separation

Due to the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, a state must make every reasonable effort to keep siblings together in the same foster and adoptive home. Sometimes, however, it is not possible to keep siblings together. Reasons for separating siblings include:

- Size of the sibling group (larger groups are often split)
- Age differences (if there is a large age gap between the children, they may be separated)
- Differences in the children's needs (a higher needs child may be split from his/her siblings)
- Safety
- Behavior problems
- Sibling rivalry
- Limits on the number of children a foster home can take in
- A worker may not be aware that a child has siblings (typically the case when children have half-siblings)

It is so important that siblings remain together if possible. Having that relationship can lead to better outcomes.

Child Welfare Information Gateway - [Sibling Issues in Foster Care and Adoption](#)

C.A.S.E. - [Sibling Bonds and Separation](#) by Ellen Singer, LCSW

Fostering Families Today - [Siblings in Foster Care: What Rights Do They Have?](#) by Madelyn Freundlich

Adopt Us Kids - [Ten Myths and Realities of Sibling Adoption](#)

National Council for Adoption - [Adoption Advocate No. 61: The Importance of Maintaining Sibling Connections in Foster Care](#)

Resources

[Brothers and Sisters in Adoption: Helping Children Navigate Relationships When New Kids Join the Family](#) by Arleta James

[Sibling Sunday](#) - For Massachusetts families. A program that offers opportunities for siblings not placed in the same home to get together.

[Camp to Belong](#) - Some states have specific weekends for separated siblings in foster care to meet up at camp.

Connect With Us!



Maintaining Sibling Connections

If a caseworker decides that placing children together with their siblings is not possible, a connection plan may be established. Depending on the relationship the children have with each other, the type of contact may range from monthly visits, yearly visits, or letters and phone calls. As the child's parent, you will be responsible for helping them maintain those relationships. While you may worry about that keeping those ties may bring up bad memories for your child, not maintaining a relationship with a sibling they are close to can be even more detrimental. Having a sibling they can reach out to may help with a child's transition. In addition, it will show your child that you are committed to making them happy and meeting their needs, which will allow them to begin to trust and attach to you.

The following are some ways to maintain a child's connections with his/her siblings:

Arrange for regular or annual visits. Work with the other children's caretakers to come up with a schedule so your children can meet up with each other on a regular or annual basis. If you live on opposite ends of the country, choose a spot in the middle or perhaps a shared vacation destination where you can all meet up.

Allow for other forms of contact during the year. Encourage your child to connect



with their siblings via phone calls, video calls, emails, and letters. Make sure before your child is placed in your home that you have the contact information for his/her siblings.

Communicate with the other family(ies).

Keeping the lines of communication open with the parents of your child's sibling(s) is key. Work through any barriers, such as scheduling conflicts, parenting values and styles, etc. Make sure to resolve any differences, and ensure that everyone is on the same page.

Plan for joint summer camps. If your child's siblings live nearby (or even if they don't), try and arrange for them to all attend the same summer camp.

Arrange for joint respite care. If the parents of your child's siblings live close, arrange to be each other's respite providers. This will allow the children to spend some extra time together during the year.