

From: Scott Corcoran [scott@afamilyforeverychild.org]
Sent: Thursday, July 18, 2013 4:00 PM
To: scott@afamilyforeverychild.org
Subject: Sibling separation
Attachments: Sibling separation.pdf; Ten myths and realities of sibling separation_AUK.pdf



Dear ,

The separating of siblings in foster care is a difficult subject to undertake. The bond between brother and sister can be very strong and can be the only source of comfort in the children's lives. The separation of siblings at a young age is a jolting experience, especially if they went through a traumatic experience together and do not want to leave each other.

Why are siblings separated?

There are some reasons for wanting or needing to separate the siblings, such as acts of conflict or special needs. The size of a sibling group can also be a factor-many foster and adoptive families are reluctant to take a large sibling group. Other reasons include:

- Placing siblings together is more expensive when it comes to financial aid like subsidies
- It's harder to coordinate a placement when the children have different workers
- A worker may not know that a child has siblings or they are unable to locate them
- The children will "feed off" of each other, and engage in acts of disobedience and defiance, making it difficult to control and parent them
- Large age difference between one or more of the siblings
- Sibling request
- Safety; if another sibling is being abusive or violent

Benefits of placing siblings together

There are a number of benefits of placing siblings together. Siblings provide can provide emotional support for each other, and it can help minimize the impact of the trauma associated with moving to new placements. It can also help minimize the trauma of being separated from their biological parents and the rest of their biological family. Other benefits include:

- Siblings can look out of each other and provide a sense of comfort and protection
- Siblings can boost each other's self-esteem
- Provides a sense of familiarity

Former foster children also share their thoughts on why their siblings are important to them [From North Carolina Division of Social Services, 2009. [Source](#).]:

"My sister is only three years old, but she has a big heart with me in it. Jayden is braver than me—she is not scared of the dark like me. When I was left alone in a big house all I had was my sister to keep me company till someone returned. I love her..."
—Joseph, age 7

" [When they] moved us and placed us all in different homes I felt as if God was punishing me for something. It broke my heart." —Arlene, age 16

"The group home that we went to forever changed our relationship. Nothing has been the same. I see them and it feels like I don't even know them at all. I raised my little sister from infancy and I see her now and she's almost a stranger to me... At one point, I couldn't even talk to any of them at all."
—Cierra, age 17

Drawbacks of separating siblings

Research has shown that there can be several negative impacts that should be considered before making deciding to separate siblings. A close family unit is important when raising any child, but if one sibling is separated from the other they can learn to not put a high value on family relationships in the future. The same can be said for the child's attitude towards relationships with peers and friends in the future. If they learn at a young age to not trust people then they will not cultivate and develop relationships later on in life. Other drawbacks include:

- Greater risk of emotional problems and issues in the classroom
- Loss of trust in foster/adoptive parents and other authority figures
- Separation of siblings can teach children to walk away from their problems rather than face them
- The loss of a caregiving sibling can be detrimental to both children

Whenever possible, siblings should be placed together. If that is not possible, other methods of keeping contact should be examined. Caseworkers can try and ensure that the siblings are placed in the same city or state, place each child with a relative, and arrange for regular visits. Adoptive families can also work together to maintain contact between siblings. Suggestions for maintaing contact include:

- Contact through social media, letters, Skype, phone calls, and visits whenever possible
- Planning summer camp experiences
- If the other family lives nearby, both families can take turns providing respite care for each other
- Encouraging contact

For more information on this topic, please view the attachment and check out the additional information links below.

Additional Information

C.A.S.E: [Sibling Bonds and Separation](#)

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

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

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