



What's your biggest fear?

Common questions from parents

by Andrew Greenfield

Andrew is a Child & Educational Psychologist, being an identical twin himself he has a great insight into the area of twin psychology.

QUESTION 1

I have twin girls (fraternal), aged 6 months. One has always been a little more unsettled than the other, and as a result she tends to get picked up and cuddled just a bit more often.

Since about the 3-month-old mark, I have noticed the other one often watching intently when I am comforting her sister. When does 'jealousy' between siblings kick in and what can you do to counteract it (and parental feelings of guilt or worry) when one twin baby seems to get more attention?

I am very conscious of trying to be 'fair', and work hard to even up the cuddles and attention, but sometimes I even worry that this is also the wrong approach ... What's your advice?

Jackie

It is important to realise that children are instinctively selfish and possessive and so jealousy is shown by every child to some extent. Development normally involves moving away from thinking only about themselves to thinking and caring about others.

Jealousy begins when your twins first realise, usually around the age of 6 months, that they don't have you ALL to themselves ALL of the time. It is not unusual to find at this age that one of them is becoming upset when they see you cuddling, or giving attention to, the other twin, even if you do so for

only a few seconds. The brief instant of having to share your attention with the other twin is enough to make any baby feel jealous. At 6 months they will make no attempt to hide this fact from you. Children become more able to handle these feelings as time passes. Your children will learn to cope with this type of jealousy when they eventually realise through experience that your attention towards someone else does not detract from your love for them. By the age of around 2 or 3 years, they probably won't become upset when they see you with their twin.

In order to avoid jealousy between siblings and especially twins, you should try to show your love to each twin equitably - spend quality time with each one; give each child gifts, toys, clothing, etc equally; accept each child for herself - love them for who they are not who you want them to be, try not to make comparisons; encourage each child to be herself - not imitations of their sibling or twin.

Jealousy can't be completely prevented but you can do a great deal to minimise it or even to convert it into positive feelings. In older children, when your child comes to realise that there is no reason to be so fearful of a rival, it strengthens their character so that they will be better able to cope with rivalry situations later in life, at work and at home. You can help your child to actually transform resentful feelings into cooperativeness and genuine altruism. The stresses and strains of 'coping' with

being a twin, can be transformed into new skills in conflict resolution, cooperation and sharing.

Treating children equally is unrealistic: there are so many individual differences, with different temperaments, interests and needs. So don't drive yourself too crazy trying to always make things fair.

Try to refrain from comparing behaviours. Never compare or praise one twin's behaviour in contrast to the other twin.

Some tips for older twins are:

- Never compare schoolwork. Kids should compare their schoolwork, test scores, and report cards only to their own previous work.
- Nurture a unique strength for each twin. All children deserve to hear from you what makes them unique. Knowledge of that talent nurtures their self-esteem as well as sets them apart from their siblings. Ideally, you should nurture a different strength for each twin based on natural temperament and interests. Once you identify the talent, find opportunities to cultivate and validate it so each twin can be acknowledged for her strength.
- Find special 'alone' time with each twin. One way to let each twin feel treasured is by spending time alone with just one parent.
- Reinforce cooperative behaviour. Don't overlook one of the simplest ways to boost sibling harmony: catch them supporting each other.

QUESTION 2

We are parents to identical twins girls, 4 and a 6 month old baby.

The girls delight us in a myriad of ways and at home are outgoing, assertive, engaging, very talkative and full of normal 3 year old mischief and fun! However, when there are visitors who they do not know or outside the home in other everyday social situations they are extremely reserved and refuse even to say hello and goodbye. I try not to label them as 'shy' and although I never mention the word in front of the girls, extreme shyness does seem to sum up their behaviour. They are exposed to other kids at playgroup and day care, but when prompted to say hello or if pressed to ask another child to play, the girls become mute and one of the girls especially will avoid any eye contact and will try to find a place to hide, behind my legs will do if nowhere else is available!

The shy behaviour, in my mind, is exacerbated by being twins, as they always have a ready playmate and are not forced to seek other company.

As an adult who was also a shy child, I know how debilitating it can be and I would like the girls to have the confidence to be themselves in any situation. I understand that a bit of shyness is normal for some kids, however, I would really appreciate any advice as to how it can be minimised.

Katy

First of all, it is important to define shyness. Because shyness is a lay term, it has no single standardized definition. And while existing definitions differ from expert to expert, you will find that most definitions incorporate elements of the following:

"...Shyness is the act of feeling uncomfortable in social situations in ways that interfere with our ability to enjoy ourselves, to perform at the level we're capable of or that cause us to avoid social situations altogether..."

Growing up as an identical twin, I remember how easy it was to only rely on my twin brother for entertainment and not have to actively seek the interaction of other children or peers as I always had a companion close by.

To help your twins overcome shyness, encourage them to:

- Play games where family members raise their hand to speak.
- Read stories to you instead of you, as a parent, reading the stories to them.
- Speak for themselves whenever possible (ordering at restaurants, around guests)
- Put on plays and skits for other family members at home on a regular basis.
- Practice social skills by Role Play, in social skills groups or working one to one with a Child Psychologist.
- Organise small play dates with the children of friends.
- Order at the local café.
- Enrol in extra curricular activities such as music or art lessons with their peers.

GOT A QUESTION TO ASK ANDREW?

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It may seem as though we were born knowing the little scripts that make up day to day interactions, but this couldn't be further from the truth. Our social scripts have been learned and some children may find these lessons harder than others. When you have a spare moment, go over these scripts with your child. For example:

- Remind your daughters that "please" and "thank you" are always important when speaking with others.
- Teach your daughters that greetings, such as "Hello. How are you?" can be answered with a smile and "I'm fine, thank you. How are you?"
- Explain to your daughters that when someone asks a question, such as her favourite food or favourite colour, it is fine to respond politely and then ask the same question back.
- Assure your daughter that when in doubt, being polite and minding her manners is always the best route to follow.
- Convince your child that if she ends up in a situation where other children are being mean, she has the power to say "That isn't very nice," and to talk about or do something else instead.

Twins share a 'special bond' and no matter how hard you try to encourage them to interact with their peers, they will always value and rely on the comfort of having a twin close by to talk to or interact with.



A TWINSANE STORY



Out of the fog of parenthood, PND, and adjustment to life with newborn twins, an innovative concept of an online store for twins and more was born...

We all know how it feels to have a stranger (or a friend or family member) make an ill-informed (perhaps rude?) comment about our babies genetics, care, or conception. Our babies are not "things" to be gawked at and treated as novelties...our babies are our pride and joy, and they, along with their families, deserve the same acknowledgement and respect as any other person. We know it's hard work, it's Twinsane! But that doesn't make it okay to pass judgment!

We like to think that the Twinsane philosophy has been instrumental in increasing social awareness and helping families embrace the positive side of raising multiples. It is heartening to see other businesses now offering items specific to twins and higher order multiples, and (mostly) resisting the urge to use the cliché "Double Trouble-type" slogans, and acknowledging the individuality of multiples.

Over the past 2½ years we have received many a thank you note or comment letting us know that in some way Twinsane has made a positive impact on a multiple mum or dad. Knowing that there are people who understand and "celebrate the crazy fun" that is parenting multiples, has been enough to get them through a bad day. We are very proud to have been able to make a little difference to so many lives!

But now it's time to hand over the reins and let someone else take charge of the Twinsanity, add their own ideas and vision, and continue to expand the online store and community.

We would like to introduce Briohny Moran as the new owner of Twinsane, and take this opportunity to wish her all the best in her new endeavour.

We would also like to thank AMBA, member clubs, our customers, and all the people who have helped Twinsane become a successful and respected business. Many thanks!

Jen & Nick Lissarrague