

# Adopting Siblings: Issues to Consider

## Outline

1. Siblings are available for adoption in all types of adoption (though rarer in private domestic adoption)
2. Why is it important to keep siblings together when placing for foster care or adoption?
  - a. For many of us, our relationships with our siblings are the longest relationships in our lives- longer than our parents, longer than our spouses
  - b. Being placed with a sibling means the child is able to maintain a connection with biological family members- which we know is important for children as they develop their sense of identity
  - c. Shared racial or cultural background- in a transracial adoption, you have another person in the family who looks like you
  - d. Siblings share a history and have survived together- the bond and connection can be strong. If a child could not be placed with a sibling, the loss of that sibling relationship would add to the long list of losses for the child
3. Advantages to adopting siblings.
  - a. Fulfilling a need; sibling groups are harder to place- not every family is equipped to care for siblings
  - b. Importance of keeping siblings together
  - c. Sometimes a shorter wait- because there are many sibling groups available and not everyone is willing or able to parent multiple children at once
  - d. Children have each other to aid in the adjustment
  - e. Instant Family- can be an advantage and a disadvantage (adjusting to a rapid increase in family size and the strain it can place in the family)
4. Special issues to consider:
  - a. Forming an attachment with both children separately.
    - i. Children maintaining their primary attachment to each other rather than to the parent(s)- they already have established trust with their sibling, parents have been less trustworthy in their experience
    - ii. Parents can feel more connected to one child over the other
      1. Nothing wrong with that- it's natural for relationships to develop differently
      2. Important thing is to make an effort and be intentional about developing a bond with the other child
    - iii. Child connecting to one parent over the other
    - iv. Tips for parents.
      1. Find individual time with the child (individual "dates", story time at night, who goes to the grocery store)
      2. Pay attention to the child's individual interests and personalities and create opportunities for those to grow
  - b. Parentified child

- i. What do we mean?
    - ii. Is it a problem?
    - iii. Tips (We can refer to the tipsheet and you can add some)
  - c. Overcoming unhealthy dynamics from their past
    - i. One child was the favorite in their previous family or families
    - ii. Negative sibling interactions
    - iii. Sibling rivalry
  - d. Siblings may grieve or adjust differently – individuals all grieve differently and at their own pace; one sibling may feel really excited to be in your home and the other may feel a strong connection to biological family members
- 5. Tips for parents adopting or fostering a sibling group?
  - a. Educate yourself before opening your home to a sibling group- it always helps to have realistic expectations... listening to this interview is a great sign!
  - b. Consider your motivation carefully- be honest with yourself and your partner about your desire to adopt a sibling group
    - i. Be careful about adopting a sibling group because you feel a connection with or a desire for one child.... for example, consider the implication for the two year old sibling if you are adopting in order to parent the newborn sibling or consider the implication on the teenager if your true desire is to parent the five-year-old sibling
  - c. Be patient with yourselves and with the children- it's a big adjustment for everyone
  - d. Ensure your marriage/partnership remains strong- it is the foundation of your family's health
    - i. As much as is possible, be on the same page when making the decision to consider a sibling group
    - ii. Even in the busy-ness of parenting multiple children, set aside time for you and your partner to have quality time together
    - iii. If parenting puts a strain on your relationship, seek couples counseling to help - setting aside the time that counseling requires is beneficial in and of itself
  - e. Seek out professional support when needed; remember how challenging a sibling group for be, seeking help is a strength (not a sign of failure)- you do not have to do it alone- especially if it proves more challenging than you were prepared for
- 6. Integrating siblings with children already in the family
  - a. Involve children already in the family early in the process of bringing additional children in the family; they might not have decision making “power” but should know the ultimate plan for the family and have an age-appropriate understanding of the process
  - b. Allow children in the family to help teach new children about the family; being the “expert” on the family life, family routines and traditions will give them a sense of importance and control

- c. Children already in the family might help new children feel safer. May be easier for the children to bond with their siblings than bonding with parents in the home.
  - d. Important to ensure individual time with children already in the family and maintaining consistent activities or time with friends so their routines are not disrupted completely
    - i. Consider having extended family or close friends schedule individual time with children already in the family - to help them feel special and to give you individual time with the new children joining the family
  - e. Recognize that adopting additional children into the family will be hard for children already in the family in some ways- they will get less attention, they will have moments of jealousy, their lives will change in real ways. But they will also develop strengths and character as a result- learning to compromise, becoming more flexible, putting others' needs over your own, additional love and relationships for your child
    - i. In moments of difficulty, have seen parents use their children already in the family as a reason for possibly dissolving the adoption/placement. It is important to acknowledge the change for children already in the family but also the benefits to children already in the family.
7. When is it not a good idea to keep siblings together?
- a. When one sibling's needs threatens the safety of the other sibling (i.e. child is physically aggressive or acts out sexually with a sibling)
  - b. When one sibling has a high level of need (high medical needs, unsafe behaviors) and finding a family to meet those high levels needs prevents all siblings from finding a family
    - i. Really difficult decision to determine which is more important- a forever family or keeping siblings together. Why being open to adopting a sibling group is fulfilling such an important need.