

Why Siblings Matter

Sibling Placements

- Siblings have at least one parent in common, may be adoptive or birth.
- 2/3rds of children in foster care also have a sibling in care.
 - Many of these siblings are not placed together initially or become separated over time (Wulczyn & Zimmerman, 2005).
 - Foster youth describe the separation as another punishment, loss, and pain (YLAT, 2002).
<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/siblingissues/>



The Power of Sibling Bond is a Persistent Theme in Sibling Studies

- In some cases, sibling relationships are more influential than any other, including those with parents.
- Sibling relationships are emotionally powerful and critically important over a lifetime as they are often the longest relationships most people experience.
 - First peer group
 - Children learn social skills: sharing and managing conflict and negotiating
 - A significant source of continuity throughout a child's lifetime
 - Warmth in sibling relationships is connected to decreased loneliness, fewer behavior problems, and higher self-worth (Stocker, 1994).
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The Bond May Be Even Stronger for Brothers and Sisters from Dysfunctional Families

(Wattenberg, 2003)

- Often siblings are more attached to each other by necessity and learn early on to depend upon and cooperate with each other to cope with difficult family life (Groza, 2003).

- For isolated children, siblings are especially crucial, often their only perceived source of help.
- They can provide support and nurture not consistently provided by parents.
- Decrease the impact of parental mental illness, substance abuse, or loss (Gass, Jenkins, & Dunn, 2007; Kittmer, 2005; Sanders, 2004).

Why Keeping Them Together Must Be a Priority

- Entering care, siblings can serve as a buffer against the worst effects of harsh circumstances.
- Promotes resilience, sense of safety, and mutual support.
- “Siblings have a shared history, and maintaining their bond provides continuity of identity and belonging.” <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/siblingissues/>
- The loss of parents and simultaneous separation from siblings compounds a child's emotional and psychological burden.
- Being separated from siblings can trigger additional grief and anxiety about siblings' well-being.
<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/siblingissues/>
- The longstanding need to reconnect with missing siblings is demonstrated by the number of separated siblings who, as adults, search for missing brothers and sisters, in numbers surpassing those who search for birth parents (New York State Coalition for Children, Inc., 2005).
- Several studies found a connection to placing siblings in the same foster home and a significantly higher rate of family reunification (Webster, et al., 2005; Albert & King, 2008).
- Siblings not placed together in foster care have less chance of maintaining their relationship while in care and even less chance to be reunited in an adoptive placement (Groza, 2003).
- A study of over 600 foster alumni found siblings were the most reported family member they felt close to (59% very; 23% somewhat) (Courtney, Dworsky, Lee, & Rapp, 2010).
- Another study of foster alumni found those who had greater access to and stronger relationships with siblings during childhood had higher levels of social support, self-esteem, income, and stronger adult sibling relationships (McCormick, 2009).
<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/siblingissues/>