

Sibling Priority

Sibling Perspective

“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

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/siblingissues/>

- One study found nearly 1/3rd of siblings named by foster children were not known to their social workers (Most were half- or step).
 - Caseworkers need to talk with children to learn their perspectives on their family relationships.
 - Often when siblings cannot all be placed together, those closest in age are placed together. This does not necessarily mean they are paired based on closeness of bond or support dynamic.

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When Placement Together is Not Possible

- There are exceptions. Instances where separation of siblings may be necessary:
 - If there are any safety concerns associated with the sibling relationship such as sexual or physical victimization (Wattenberg, 2003).
 - The child has special needs that can only be met by separation.
 - The child has resided for a significant period of time and formed a strong attachment to current caregivers who offer permanency.

Other Ways to Ensure Connection is Maintained

- If siblings must be placed in separate homes:
 - Initiate sibling contact and visits immediately.
 - Consult children on the planning process for visits with their siblings.
 - Continue visits regardless of parental involvement.
 - Place in close proximity, same school if possible.
 - Place with caregivers committed to continued contact.
 - Assign one caseworker for all children in the family.
 - Encourage siblings to create lifebooks together and/or share a journal back and forth between visit time.
 - Make sure siblings have phone numbers, addresses, and other contact information.
 - Encourage the exchange of letters, cards, and e-mails.
 - Arrange joint therapy sessions, shared vacations, and weekend respites together (Wattenberg, 2003).