

WISCONSIN TWIN RESEARCH NEWSLETTER



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Spotlight on Research Touch and Sound Sensitivities

Does the tag sewn on the collar of your shirt irritate you? Does the rubbing of wool against your skin make you cringe? Is the sound of a fingernail scraping across a blackboard bothersome? Without a doubt, some adults and children fuss about such stimulation, or exhibit behaviors that may fall under the category of tactile or auditory “defensive.” At the extreme, some individuals may find some auditory and tactile stimulation to be intolerable. On the other hand, some individuals are only mildly sensitive to such stimulation, while others barely take notice. The importance of differences among individuals with sensory defensiveness is not well understood, nor are the causes known. We are exploring this topic through examination of data collected from Wisconsin Twin Project families.

How can studying twins help us to understand this topic better? Studying all types of twins allows us to identify both genetic and environmental influences on development. Identical twins share 100% of their genetic makeup, while fraternal twins share on average 50% (like non-twin siblings). What is unique to twins is that we can generally assume that differences are not due to differences in their family environment. Twins involved with our project are raised in the same household, so it is expected that identical and fraternal twin pairs experience the family environment to the same degree. For example, twins experience the same family structure, parenting styles, and socioeconomic status. Differences between fraternal twins can be due to genetic differences or differences in non-family aspects of the environment. For identical twins, of course, there are no genetic differences. Thus, unlike studying singleton siblings, we can study behavioral relationships between twin pairs and estimate the heritability of a certain trait or behavior. For

example, if identical twin pairs are more similar than fraternal twin pairs on a given trait we estimate that there is a stronger genetic influence on that trait.

Thus, we were motivated to explore these sensory sensitivities with the assumption that the defensive behaviors are real and deserve systematic study. We examined the identical and fraternal twin similarity for auditory and tactile sensitivities in approximately seven hundred 2-year-old twin pairs born in Wisconsin from 1998 to 2000. Information was collected during a telephone interview. Caregivers answered questions concerning each twin’s sensitivities to touch and sound. For example, caregivers were asked, “When touching a new object, how often did your child seem concerned by how smooth or rough the texture was?” Data from all of the families were compiled and analyzed as a group. For our sample, identical twins were more similar than fraternal twins with respect to auditory and tactile sensitivities, leading us to infer some genetic influence for these sensitivities. The identical-fraternal difference was greater for tactile defensiveness, suggesting a stronger genetic influence for tactile defensiveness. These preliminary findings merit further investigation.

The next step in this study involves contacting some of these families and asking more specific questions relating to touch and sound sensitivities. In addition, the follow-up will involve a home visit so we can assess the sensitivities of the twins in more detail. We want to find out if these sensitivities “run in families,” so the home visit will also entail questions for the parents of the twins. Stay tuned to future issues of the newsletters for updates relating to our findings about auditory and tactile defensiveness.

Double Talk?

Twins and Language Development



Speech and language delays and difficulties are somewhat more common in twins than in singletons. The reasons for these delays are largely unknown. However, there are several suggestions that speech specialists often offer to parents

that might assist in speech and language development.

As always, it is important to provide a language-rich environment. What is said, and how it is said, directly influences twins' speech development. Here are just a few tips to foster speech and language development in twins:

1. Talk, talk, talk. Describe to your twins what is going on around them, what they are doing, and what you are doing. Create ample opportunity for them to listen to speech.

2. Seize any opportunity to talk to each twin individually. Deliver praise and give directions to each twin separately, instead of jointly. Create one-on-one conversations as much as possible.

3. Promote speech. If your twins are gesturing or using grunts to communicate, encourage them to use words. Instead of picking them up when they raise their arms, ask, "What do you want? Tell Mommy/Daddy." Correct or repeat the word or pronunciation if needed. Praise any attempt made toward saying the word.

4. Utilize playtime. Take the time to sit and talk to your twins through their toys and model turn-taking, facial expressions, and greetings. They will love the time with you and learn how to use language.

5. Avoid too much baby talk. Provide the correct pronunciation of words for your twins. They will use the pronunciations that you encourage them to use.

6. Value silence. Pause a moment after you ask a question or make a statement that requires a response. This gives children time to think about what you said, and what they want to say.

7. Remember that twins who are late in aspects of their speech development often catch up by age 6 or 7. However, if you are concerned about a language delay or difficulty, discuss your concerns with your pediatrician.

Twibling Rivalry

Twibling (twin sibling) rivalry can take many shapes and forms and can start at just about any age, but when twins hit primary and/or middle school, competitive rivalry often erupts. One of the most common forms of rivalry between twins at this age involves competition over performance in school. If your twins have twibling rivalry down to a tee, it may be time to intervene.

Try not to make comparisons about their performance in school. Comparisons encourage competitiveness between them and may lessen one child's self-esteem. If comparisons are made, make sure that praise is also given to the twin who exhibits the lesser quality.

Observe each child's uniqueness and talents in school. Ask the teacher what he or she views as each one's specific talents. Let each twin know that you recognize and value his or her individual abilities.

When necessary, encourage the twins to study different subjects in school; this may in turn lessen their academic rivalry. It may also allow them to explore things they would otherwise not discover about themselves.



Let them know how proud you are when they are not fighting or when they are getting along in a situation that involves sharing or working together. Your praise will reflect the idea that fighting does not fix or make anything better; working together is a much more successful route to take!

Remind them that they only have one twin and that the relationship is valuable and unique. Discuss how the costs of hurting or ruining the relationship over competition is not worth the benefits that can arise from working to get along with one another.

Teachers must also recognize that although they are twins, they do not have the same aptitude in every subject. Encourage teachers to compare each twin against the performance of the entire class as a whole, rather than against the performance of the co-twin.



Twins and Individuality During Adolescence

How often have you heard, “I wish I had a twin,” or “Having a twin would be so much fun?” Of course, having a twin is a lot of fun, but sometimes sharing that bond can feel restricting. In the case of adolescent twins, the development of individuality is often more complex and stressful than for singletons. It may be hard for adolescents and parents to strike a balance between embracing the shared aspects of a twin relationship while simultaneously searching outside of that relationship to discover information about other components of one’s identity.



Parents’ duties during the adolescent years can also be stressful. Parents may alleviate some of the stress by reassuring themselves and the twins that they do not have to be involved in, or like, the same things. Of course, it is always okay for the twins to be involved in the same activities if they both enjoy them. Encourage them to try new and different things, regardless of what their co-twin does.

During the twins’ adolescent years, new friendships may be formed with people other than their co-twin. This can be hard at first by making them feel lost or “cut in half,” but parents can help them to understand that their twin will always be around for them; they are not losing a friend. By making new and different friends, the twins are becoming individuals. In fact, they can strengthen their bond by learning more about themselves as individuals and supporting their differences in choices, beliefs, abilities, and likes/dislikes. It also prepares them for transition into adult life, where they will not always be together or in the same social circles.

There are many areas to explore when discovering one’s identity: physical, academic, social, and even romantic. Whatever the differences, never forget that part of their identity is being a twin. Teach them to embrace it, enjoy it, and find power in that, as well as in who they are as individual people.

1. For glue solution: mix glue, 1/3 cup warm water, and food coloring in a small bowl.
2. For Borax solution: In a medium zip lock baggie, mix Borax and 1/3 cup warm water.
3. Pour glue solution into baggie with Borax solution, gently knead (squash) together.
4. HAVE FUN PLAYING!!!

Twins and Autism We need your help!



We estimate that there are approximately 65 pairs of twins under the age of 16 years in Wisconsin in which one or both twins has autism, or some other form of pervasive developmental disorder (PDD-NOS or Aspergers Syndrome). We have great personal and scientific interest in these disorders and are beginning a twin research study to help understand these complex disorders.

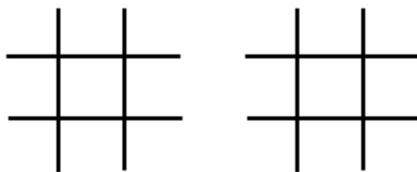
Thus far, we have located about 35 twin pairs in which one or both has autism or a related challenge; however, this is an insufficient number to do our research. We would appreciate a phone call or email from the parents of any twin with autism (identical or fraternal, boy or girl, regardless of whether the co-twin has a disorder or not) living anywhere in Wisconsin. We would appreciate our readers mentioning our efforts to parents of twins with autism spectrum disorders. All we need to know at this time are the age and diagnosis of the twins, as well as contact information for the future. We would like to know about the existence of all such twin pairs, even if they might not choose to participate in the study.

It Takes Two Fun for All Ages!



Jokes
 “Knock, knock”
 “Who’s there?”
 “Spell.”
 “Spell who?”
 “W-H-O!”

Tic Tac Toe



Recipe for Flubber

Glue solution:
 1/2 cup Elmer’s white glue
 1/3 cup warm water
 food coloring

Borax solution:
 1 teaspoon Borax
 1/3 cup warm water
 zip lock baggie



Please let us know if your address or phone number changes.

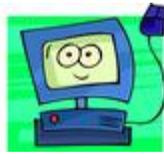
Email wisconsintwins@waisman.wisc.edu
Phone (608) 265-2674

As an expert on your own twins, you possess important knowledge. We appreciate the time you take to talk on the phone, fill out questionnaires, and visit with us. Each piece of information furthers research in child development.

We value your input!

View our newsletter IN COLOR!

Visit our website!
<http://psych.wisc.edu/wtp>



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THANK YOU!

