

WISCONSIN TWIN RESEARCH NEWSLETTER

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Spotlight on Research Classroom Separation

Sending a child off to school for the first time can be stressful for any parent. However, parents of twins face the additional challenge of deciding whether to place the twins in the same or separate classrooms. Some people believe that twins should be separated into different classrooms because the close bond that twins share may discourage them from making new friendships and from exploring their own individuality. On the other hand, others believe that separating twins while they are also adjusting to school can lead to emotional difficulties. A recent study in London, England explored the effects of classroom separation in order to determine whether staying together or separating is better for the twins' behavioral and educational development.

Researchers studied same sex twins (both identical and fraternal) at age five, with a follow-up at age seven. Three groups of twins were studied: 1) twins who were assigned to the same classroom at ages five and seven, 2) twins who were assigned to the same classroom at age five but different classrooms at age seven, and 3) twins who were assigned to separate classrooms at age five and at age seven. The researchers studied the twins' behavioral and educational development through interviews and questionnaires completed by parents and teachers of the twins.

The results indicated that twins placed in separate classrooms at five showed more problems with withdrawal, somatic complaints, and anxiousness and/or depression, and had lower reading levels than twins who were never separated and twins separated at a later age. Furthermore, follow-ups indicated that a large number of identical twins continued to have these problems in later childhood.

Researchers found that twins separated at age seven had slightly different reactions. Like twins who were put into separate classrooms at age five, identical twins separated at age seven showed more problems with withdrawal, somatic complaints, and anxiousness and/or depression and had lower reading levels than twins never put into separate classrooms. However, fraternal

twins separated at age seven did not show more emotional difficulties or lower reading levels. Overall, these findings indicate that classroom separation may have a negative effect on the twins' behavioral and educational development. In addition, twins' zygosity may be a factor in how the twins adjust to classroom separation, with identical twins having a more difficult time than fraternal.

While this study provides an exciting first step toward understanding the effects of classroom separation on twin behavior and development, it is important for parents to remember that the results have limitations. First, this study was conducted using a sample of twins and families from London, England. While the conclusions drawn from the study can be useful in shedding some light on general behavior patterns or trends, the results and findings are not necessarily representative of an American population. A similar study conducted in the United States could produce different results. Second, it is important to remember that while a significant number of separated twins experienced behavioral and educational problems, many of the separated twins (both identical and fraternal) adjusted and progressed well despite the separation. The decision of classroom separation is one that should be made on an individual basis, keeping in mind the characteristics and personality of each twin. Staying together might be best for some twins, while separation works better for others. This study emphasizes the need for parents and teachers to work together in order to find the best arrangement for each individual family and child. By working together, monitoring progress and behavior, and getting involved if problems are found, parents and teachers can help each child succeed.

For more information on the education of multiples, please visit The National Organization of Mothers of Twins Clubs, Inc. website library at <http://www.nomotc.org/library/guidelines.html>.



Wisconsin Children's Museums: A Fun Fall Fieldtrip

Children's museums are known for being hands-on places to explore. There are many interactive exhibits and programs that are available at the children's museums throughout Wisconsin. Many of the activities are as much fun as they are a learning experience for children as young as age 3.

These museums encourage children to partake in activities that inspire imagination, role-playing, and self-expression. Most museums offer kids the opportunity to try out various musical instruments in order to learn about hearing and sound. Also, they can also explore the human body by crawling through giant human organs or examining x-rays. Kids can also participate in role-playing, whether it is an archeological dig, playing dress up, driving a fire engine, flying a plane, or constructing their own towns and villages. Furthermore, each museum usually has numerous arts and crafts activities that encourage the use of imagination and creativity.

Going to a children's museum is a great year round activity for the whole family to enjoy. Here is a list of a few of these museums throughout Wisconsin. If there is not one listed close to your home, you can try www.wisconline.com or call (800) 575-9781 to find a children's museum that is more conveniently located. Each museum is a great opportunity for your twins and family to explore together!

Wisconsin Children's Museums:

- Madison Children's Museum.
100 State St. (608) 256-6445
- Fox Cities Children's Museum in
Appleton. 100 W. College Ave. (920)
734-3226
- Exploration Children's Museum of Green
Bay. 320 N. Adams St. (920) 432-4397
- Betty Brinn Children's Museum in
Milwaukee. 929 E. Wisconsin Ave. (414)
390-5437 ext 238
- Above and Beyond Children's Museum in
Sheboygan. 902 N. 8th St. (920) 458-4263
- Children's Museum of La Crosse. 207 5th
Ave South. (608) 784-2652

Tempering Temper Tantrums Times Two

Although the "terrible twos" earned the name for a reason, perhaps this stage is viewed too negatively. With an accurate understanding of what your twins are attempting to express by exhibiting defiant behavior, the "terrible twos" can be enjoyable, twice over, for parents of twins.

Because these 2-year-olds are gaining both independence and new intellectual and physical abilities at a rapid pace, parents are often taken aback by some of their child's behavior. Inappropriate behaviors may be a result of the child's frustration with his or her limited speech or inability to accomplish a desired task. Often when a toddler wants something that they are unable to ask for, they turn to kicking and screaming on the ground in an effort to convey that they have an unmet need.

The challenging task of equipping 2-year old twins with appropriate behavior skills can be made easier by establishing house rules that are both fair and attainable. When these rules are broken, parents may wish to establish consistent consequences that the children learn to expect, and eventually avoid.

When parenting twins, consistency and fairness is a special consideration. While it is tempting to be easier on the twin acting out on account of the other twin's influence, it is important to evaluate behavior on a cause and effect basis. The twin who does not receive consequences when he or she has broken a rule will not understand these special circumstances, and may instead think that misbehavior is acceptable at times.

Twins themselves can serve as useful learning tools for each other in the development of communication and negotiating skills. Twins who watch their co-twin successfully express and satisfy a desire are provided with a useful model to apply to their own behavior. With consistent rules and modeling behavior, twins will learn the skills necessary to communicate desires and accomplish tasks, which will reduce the frequency of tantrums.





Twins and Teen Dating

During adolescence many twins begin showing more interest in social relationships. Many of these relationships will start including members of the opposite sex. Yes, we are talking about dating. Dating may be an awkward subject for some parents and children, but it is important to remember that it is a major component of socialization and allows young adolescents a chance to learn about themselves and their peers. The “D” word can be scary for many parents, and parents of twins have double the worry. While parents may have twice the worry, adolescent twins face the typical pains of teenage dating, as well as some unique challenges and concerns.

One additional challenge that twins face when beginning to date is the difference in timing of readiness to date between the twins. If one twin starts dating earlier than his or her co-twin, the co-twin may feel pressure to start dating, even if they are not ready. Another concern may have to do with separation issues. Many twins, up until adolescence, have spent almost all of their time together. When one twin starts spending more time with a boyfriend or girlfriend, the co-twin may become jealous, resentful or competitive.

Here are a few tips to keep in mind as your twins reach this milestone in their lives:

- 1) Talk with your twins about dating before they actually begin to date. This will help establish good dialogue. Although it may be uncomfortable at first, establishing a line of communication between you and your twins makes it easier for them to come to you if or when any problems or questions arise.
- 2) Discuss expectations, and let the twins have a say (remember how you felt at their age!), so that everyone is clear and in agreement about what the rules are.
- 3) Listen to your twins concerns and stories. This shows them that you care about their feelings and input.
- 4) Make safety an important topic. Always let them know you are available to pick them up if they are uncomfortable or in an emergency.

Leaf Suncatcher

You need:

- Wax Paper
- Fall Leaves
- Crayon Shavings
- Adult with Iron
- Newspaper



Instructions:

Cover work surface with newspapers. Sprinkle a small amount of crayon shavings on a piece of wax paper. Arrange leaves on top. Sprinkle more crayon shavings and cover with another piece of wax paper.

Place a piece of newspaper on top and iron with a warm iron until crayon shavings melt. Trim and hang in the window.

Twins and Autism

We estimate that there are as many as 120 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 Asperger Syndrome). We have great personal and scientific interest in these disorders, and we have just received a large grant from the National Institute of Health to begin a twin research study to help understand these complex disorders.

Thus far, we have located over 70 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.

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

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



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



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!

DO YOU HAVE COMMENTS, QUESTIONS, OR SUGGESTIONS?

- If your twins are under the age of 3 years, contact Carrie Arneson at clarneso@wisc.edu or (608) 265-2674.
- If your twins are over the age of 3 years, contact Nicci Schmidt at nlschmidt2@wisc.edu or Cory Schmidt at ckshmidt@wisc.edu or (608) 265-2674.
- If you want to relay information to us about a twin or set of twins with autism or other related disorder, please contact Dr. Hill Goldsmith at (608) 262-9932 or hgoldsm@wisc.edu.

Address Service Requested

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