

WISCONSIN TWIN RESEARCH NEWSLETTER



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Spotlight on Research Developmental Assets and Healthy Adaptation in Childhood

Have your twins ever faced a challenge and one twin faced the challenge with enthusiasm while the other twin shut down or panicked? Differences in their coping may be attributed to differences in developmental assets. Recently, there has been public and academic interest as to how developmental assets contribute to social, emotional, and academic success.

Research in this area has found that some children are able to successfully overcome challenges that can make it difficult for an individual to succeed at home and in school. For example, some children are able to succeed in school despite the fact that they argue with their teachers. Even some children who might face several behavioral challenges are able to achieve goals and adapt well in various situations.

To understand key developmental assets, data were examined in approximately three hundred 5 to 11-year-old twin pairs. Caregivers answered questions pertaining to each twin's health and behavior during a telephone interview. Data were compiled and analyzed as a group. For this sample, of the 40 developmental assets that were considered, five assets significantly characterized twins who had social and emotional success, despite facing challenges. The assets were:

- positive social relations,
- appropriate levels of activity,
- appropriate levels of self-control,
- appropriate levels of soothability, and
- appropriate levels of anger.

The twins with these assets were able to engage successfully in positive relationships with teachers, family, and peers. In addition, they were able to regulate their emotions and activity level.

Regulation of one's emotions appears to play a strong role in healthy development. Particularly, the ability to regulate negative emotions, such as

fear, sadness, or anger, is important for recovering from difficult experiences. Some children who are prone to experiencing negative emotions, such as anxiety and distress, do not rebound as easily from stressful experiences. Generally, children who experience positive emotions and are sociable and agreeable tend to be more socially competent, which is associated with higher self-control.

One's ability to comply with social norms and display empathic social behavior is also important. Following standards from one's family and society and expressing concern for others contribute to learning socially governed behavior. Developing these assets early has a positive effect on later social functioning at school and with peers.

What can help build developmental assets and put a child on the road to healthy adaptation? Children who exhibit social skills show adaptive qualities in all areas of development. Positive social adaptation occurs with involvement in extracurricular activities, positive role models, and successful school experiences that highlight and foster individual talents.

Family members also contribute to social competence. A close, caring relationship with a warm, consistent parenting figure is a protective factor. Positive extended family networks contribute to social competence as well. Religious groups, youth groups, and community organizations can serve as extended networks of support.

These preliminary findings suggest assets that may be important to success in social, emotional and academic development. These will be explored further as we continue to conduct phone interviews with parents of twins during the coming years. If you are interested in learning more about developmental assets, please visit the Search Institute in Minneapolis, MN at www.search-institute.org.



Getting to Know Other Families with Twins

Are you interested in getting involved with other families with twins in your area? Wisconsin provides a variety of resources that may be valuable to you and your twins. Most twin clubs in Wisconsin meet on a monthly basis, and offer the opportunity for parents to make connections with other parents of multiples who can offer personal support and answer questions. Many clubs also host special speakers and fun events for families. Please be aware that some online twin clubs and/or organizations require an initial membership fee, but most people agree that the benefits from being a member outweigh the membership fee.

- ✦ Waukesha Mothers of Twins Club, www.geocities.com/wmotc
- ✦ Madison Area Mothers of Multiples, www.madisonmultiples.com
- ✦ Milwaukee Mothers of Twins Clubs Inc., www.milwaukeeotc.org
- ✦ Wisconsin Organization of Mothers of Twins Clubs, www.womotc.org
- ✦ National Organization of Mothers of Twins Club, Inc., www.nomotc.org
- ✦ Mothers of Supertwins Online, www.mostonline.org

Although all of the above listed organizations are stated as being for “mothers,” each twins club is open to fathers and other family members and their input and membership.

There are clubs available in almost every area in Wisconsin. If you are interested in finding an organization in your area that is not listed above, you can go to www.womotc.org and click on the link for Member Clubs. This website tells you of all known twin clubs in Wisconsin, when they meet, and who to contact for information on becoming a member. Feel free to contact our staff member, Carrie Arneson (see back of newsletter for contact information) for help in finding an organization in your area.

Undivided Attention: Spending Time with Each Twin

Twins spend their lives as a pair. Certainly, that bond is special and unique. Learning who each twin is outside of the pair may be of value too. One way to get to know each one's different personalities, quirks, views, and opinions is to spend time alone with each twin. Getting to know each twin as a separate individual may enhance the bond with each and strengthen the relationships.

As you know, the thought of scheduling these times into a day that is already packed may seem overwhelming! However, finding alone time may be easier if the focus is getting to know each twin, not the activity that is chosen. The setting certainly does not need to be extravagant, nor does it need to involve spending money. For example, one twin can help run errands or walk the dog. Or, one twin can help with dinner, clean up a room, or complete other household tasks. Other moments can occur when helping them with their homework or projects, or assisting with their involvement in extracurricular activities. And, both twins can benefit, since the other twin can spend time with his or her other parent or any relatives or friends who wish to know each twin and his or her uniqueness.

A child (and perhaps the person they are with) can feel special, unique, and important with even a short amount of alone time with a caregiver or friend. Each twin can have the opportunity to talk about topics that he or she may not want to discuss around other siblings, or get a chance to play a game that the other twin does not enjoy.

Indeed, the possible benefits are not limited just to the twins. These opportunities will also afford each twin with knowledge about who the other person is as an individual. It may be surprising to find that the twins act differently when they are separated from one another. And, it may be surprising to find that others act differently with each twin! Continue to take advantage of the quality time your family spends together!





Twin Adolescents and Puberty

Adolescence for twins is a time for growth and uncertainty...and it can affect parents in much the same way! Triple that for the young person going through it, and you have a family riding the roller coaster of puberty. So what if you have twins? Will you ever survive!? The answer is, Yes!

The timing of pubertal development has a strong familial component, which means that girls often begin developing and begin their periods around the same time that their mothers did. Boys may follow their father's developmental pattern as well, including facial hair growth and height. For males, puberty usually occurs between the ages of thirteen and sixteen, while for females between the ages of eleven and fourteen. These ages of course are not set in stone, and variability is always present. Dizygotic (fraternal) twins should have the same variation in development as siblings who are not twins. Monozygotic (identical) twins, who share all of the same genetic material, should enter puberty at approximately the same time, but there can still be some natural variation. Other things that can come with puberty are facial acne, weight gain, deepening of the voice, and much more.

When one twin develops more quickly than the other, either physically or socially, there can be resentment or jealousy towards the other twin. With twins, the twin left out of the social circle can feel inadequate, or the twin who has developed first can be sensitive about their physical changes. Privacy is important at this age. Sometimes when the twins are emotionally close, it is difficult for them to admit feeling jealousy or resentment towards each other. Parents may want to give them a safe place to address those feelings.

During this time in an adolescent's life, it is important for parents to be supportive, accessible, and empathetic. Make ample opportunity for supportive discussions with each as individuals and as a pair, and both children should feel they could go to either or both parents privately or otherwise to talk about their concerns. Parents can also encourage the twins to talk through these differences amongst themselves. By making privacy and courtesy a priority between twins, puberty doesn't have to be more stressful for twins than it is for singletons.

It Takes Two--Fun for All Ages!

| | |
|--|--|
| "Knock! Knock!" | "Knock! Knock!" |
| "Who's there?" | "Who's there?" |
| "Snow!" | "Snow!" |
| "Snow who?" | "Snow who?" |
| "Snow skating today – the ice is too thin!" | "Snow business like show business!" |

Balloon Shaker

What you'll need:

- A balloon
- Filler material*: dried beans, unpopped popcorn, dry rice, sand, or salt

What to do:

- Pour your choice of filler material into the balloon. A funnel is helpful for this. If you have trouble getting enough filler into the balloon, try blowing in a little air so the filler settles to the bottom, letting the air out, then adding more filler into the neck.
- Blow up the balloon and tie off the end.

To play, just shake, shake, shake! Try experimenting with how different fillers sound, or how more or less air changes the volume and tone of the sound.

*Be careful with your choice of filler material—things like dry rice can be a little sharp, and may pop the balloon!

Twins and Autism We need your help!



We estimate that there are as many as 100 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's Syndrome). We have great personal and scientific interest in these disorders, and we just received a small grant from the National Alliance for Autism Research (a parent-founded group; see www.naar.org for more information) to begin a twin research study to help understand these complex disorders.

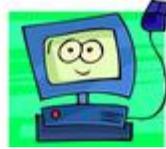
Thus far, we have located over 50 twin pairs in which one or both has autism or a related challenge; however, this is an insufficient number to do our research. We would appreciate a phone call or email from the parents of any twin with autism (identical or fraternal, boy or girl, regardless of whether 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>



THANK YOU!

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.

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