

Ten Myths and Realities of Sibling Adoption

1 Myth: When a child is acting in the parental role, he/she should be separated from younger siblings to give him/her a chance to “be a child” and/or reduce interference with the new adult parent.

Reality: Separating the older child is detrimental to both that child and the younger children. The younger children must face life in unfamiliar circumstances without the support of the older child, and the older child is often left feeling responsible for the younger siblings even when they are not placed together. Adoptive families who are prepared to deal with this dynamic can help these siblings develop appropriate roles.

2 Myth: Brothers and sisters should be separated to prevent sibling rivalry especially when there is extreme conflict.

Reality: Separating siblings teaches them to walk away from conflict and increases the trauma they already feel in being separated from all that is familiar to them. It does not allow the children an opportunity to learn to resolve differences and develop stronger sibling relationships in a healthy, supportive environment.

3 Myth: Siblings should be separated when one sibling is abusing the other.

Reality: It is important to distinguish between true abuse and all other forms of sibling hostility while considering measures other than separation that can protect the child who is being abused. Removing a child from his/her sibling does not guarantee that the child will not be abused in another setting. Having adoptive parents who are aware of the abuse and who put in place safety plans to address it is an option to keep siblings together.

4 Myth: A child with special needs should be placed separately from sibs in order to receive more focused attention.

Reality: An adoptive family who is prepared to meet the special needs of a child as well as that child's siblings may offer the best opportunity for the child to receive the attention he/she needs. A child placed with his/her siblings may actually receive more personalized attention than a child placed into a family where there are other children with similar special needs requiring increased attention and resources.

5 Myth: Sibling relationships should only be considered viable when the children have grown up together or have the same biological parents.

Reality: Children who experience life in the child welfare system often form a variety of “sibling like” relationships with non-related brothers and sisters they have lived with both in their biological families and in foster care. Professionals placing children need to take into consideration the child's definition of who is and is not a sibling before making adoption placement decisions.

6 Myth: Families willing to consider adopting a sibling group need to be willing to adopt groups that on average include four or more children.

Reality: The majority of waiting children with siblings on the AdoptUsKids website are in sibling groups of two (58%) or three siblings (24%) while fewer are in sibling groups of four to six siblings (18%). (McRoy 2010)

7 Myth: There are insufficient numbers of homes that have the willingness or capacity to parent large sibling groups.

Reality: Most waiting families registered on AdoptUsKids (83%) are willing to adopt more than one child. (McRoy 2010) Some adoptive families express the desire to adopt “ready made” families of sibling groups. Other larger families are willing to adopt larger sibling groups. Policies and procedures that provide exceptions and incentives for families who adopt siblings groups are essential.

8 Myth: Potential adoptive families are less likely to express interest in children who are featured in recruitment efforts as members of sibling groups.

Reality: Recruitment efforts specifically designed for sibling groups that include: resource families who have raised siblings to recruit and talk to potential families; the use of media to publicize the need for families willing to adopt these groups; and recruitment pictures of the children taken as a group, have proven most effective in placing brothers and sisters together.

9 Myth: Families who adopt sibling groups need to be wary of the brothers and sisters joining together to cause problems in the adoptive family.

Reality: Research indicates that siblings placed together benefit from the sibling bond in ways that do not present problems to the parent/child relationship. Older children in the sibling group are thought to provide emotional support to their younger siblings. There is evidence to suggest that siblings who are placed separately in adoption have more anxiety and depression than those who are placed together. (Groza 2003)

10 Myth: There are higher rates of failed adoptions in families who adopt siblings.

Reality: Siblings who are placed separately are more likely to demonstrate greater emotional and behavioral problems. Research indicates that when siblings are placed together, they experience many emotional benefits with less moves and a lower risk for failed placements. (Leathers 2005)

Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-351) —Guidance on Sibling Placements

The title IV-E agency must:

- Make reasonable efforts to place siblings removed from their home in the same foster care, adoption or guardianship placement.
- Facilitate frequent visitation or ongoing interactions for siblings who cannot be placed together (as determined by the agency).
- Make exceptions when the agency determines that placement together or visitation/ongoing interaction is contrary to the safety or well-being of any of the siblings.

The title IV-E agency has discretion to:

- Define siblings or sibling groups.
- Set standards for visitation and contact (a minimum of monthly).
- Determine appropriate settings and supervision of visits.

The Children's Bureau encourages an agency to:

- Develop standard decision-making protocols for workers.
- Conduct periodic reassessments of situations in which siblings are unable to be placed together or have frequent visitation.

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Resource List

Myths 1-4

Myths listed and concepts taken from:

National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency Planning. *NRCFCPP Sibling Practice Curriculum*. Hunter College School of Social Work. New York, NY. Author.

National Adoption Information Clearinghouse. (1992). *The Sibling Bond: Its Importance in Foster Care and Adoptive Placement*. Author. Retrieved from <http://www.childwelfare.gov/>.

Myth 5

Cohn, M. (2008). *Sibling Placement: The importance of the sibling relationship for children in foster care*. National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice and Permanency Planning. New York, NY.

Myths 6-7

McRoy, R. (2010). *Special Report: Characteristics of Sibling Groups Registered on the AdoptUsKids Website*. Center for Social Work Research. Austin, Texas.

Myth 8

Northeast Ohio Adoption Services. (2001). *The Sisters and Brothers Together Project: Final Project Report for Federal Adoption Opportunities Grant #90 CO 0821*. Warren, Ohio. Author.

Myth 9

Groza V., Maschmeier, C., Jamison, C., and Piccola, T. (2003). Siblings and Out-of-Home Placement: Best Practices. *Families in Society*, 84, 480-490.

Groze, V. (1996). *Successful Adoptive Families: A Longitudinal Study of Special Needs Adoption*. New York: Praeger.

Myth 10

Kernan, E., (2005). Keeping Sibling Together Past, Present, and Future. *Youth Law News*, Vol. 24 (4).

The original citation is:

Leathers, S. (2005). Separation from siblings: Associations with placement adaptation and outcomes among adolescents in long-term foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 27(7), 793-819.

Festinger, T. (1986). *Necessary risk: A study of adoptions and disrupted adoptive placements*. Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America.

Rosenthal, J.A., Schmidt, D., & Conner, I. (1988). Predictors of special needs adoption disruption: An exploratory study. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 10, 101-117.