

ARTIFICIAL TWINNING

Understanding the Controversial Practice in Adoption

WHAT IS ARTIFICIAL TWINNING?

Artificial twins or virtual twins are two non-biological siblings who are born within the same nine to twelve month period of time. Adoption professionals typically recommend avoiding this practice, as it can create complications for a family and for the children involved. Care should also be taken to avoid interrupting the existing birth order within a family. Consult an adoption professional or adoption-competent therapist.



WAYS ARTIFICIAL TWINNING CAN OCCUR WITHIN AN ADOPTIVE FAMILY SYSTEM:

- A** A family adopts a child who is close in age to a biological child already in the home.
- B** An foster/adoptive family adopts two unrelated children who are close in age.
- C** A family becomes pregnant while pursuing adoption, giving birth shortly after receiving an adoption placement.

DRAWBACKS OF ARTIFICIAL TWINNING

While it may seem advantageous to have siblings close together, the long-term challenges outweigh the benefits of having built-in playmates:

- Difficulty with bonding and attachment
- Challenges with meeting the unique needs of children from different backgrounds
- Unfair comparisons and unhealthy expectations between the two children
- Privacy concerns regarding the adopted child's identity and story as strangers regularly ask "Are they twins?"
- Interruption of birth order can impact children long-term
- Different parenting and discipline styles can lead to resentment between the siblings
- Two unrelated adoptees may have different levels of openness with their birth family
- Transracial adoption issues may be an added factor which complicates the family system

PARENTING CHILDREN AT DIFFERENT DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES

While biological twins typically hit developmental milestones at the same rate, two children from different backgrounds who are weeks or months apart will likely hit milestones at different rates. This can lead to unhelpful comparison between the two children. Here's an example: Jabari was born to his parents three months before his parents began fostering a newborn named Kyleigh. Jabari met every developmental milestone on time or early, but Kyleigh was often just a little behind the typical rate for milestones. She had been exposed to opiates prenatally and was born three weeks early, which accounted for the slight delays. However, her foster parents were often very concerned when she didn't meet the expectations set by Jabari's rate of development. As a result, the children grew up with a sense that Jabari was more advanced than Kyleigh.

Children close in age may attend the same school and be in the same grade, but may struggle to navigate expectations by peers and school professionals who may assume they are typical twins. In addition to different personalities, physical features, and histories, one child may have experienced more early hardships than the other, leading to more noticeable expressions of trauma, prenatal drug exposure, or mental illness. This can lead the struggling child to blame themselves for the discrepancies they see between themselves and their "twin."



ARTIFICIAL TWINNING CAN IMPACT ATTACHMENT

Bonding and attachment are critical, particularly for infants and young children. Doing so simultaneously with children from different backgrounds can make it challenging to meet both children's unique needs. Bonding with a biological child may look different than the intentional attachment strategies recommended in adoption. Discipline styles may also take attachment into account. New parents may feel overwhelmed by the attachment needs of two unrelated children.

ARTIFICIAL TWINNING AND THE CHALLENGES OF PROTECTING PRIVATE ADOPTEE DETAILS

As with any family, adoptive parents must decide in advance how much or how little of their child's story to share. Adoptive families are advised to protect the child's private story as much as possible so they can decide for themselves what to tell. However, families with children close in age are often asked questions by well-meaning strangers, including "Are they twins?" This frequent question can make it difficult to avoid sharing details, even if it's to say "No, they aren't." This often opens up more questions as strangers seek to understand the confusing family dynamic. Well-meaning curiosity is often unavoidable.

