



Twins: Two Distinct Individuals

Whenever I meet someone who happened to grow up as a twin, I always ask if there was anything he would have preferred his parents to have done differently. Most of the time the response I hear is some variation on a similar theme: I wish our parents didn't... "give us the same thing for our birthday," "dress us in identical outfits," "expect us to share everything."



While some people assume all twins are the same, others take it to the other extreme. Many people ask me if my twin sons are opposites—is one social while the other is a recluse? Is one more talkative and the other quiet? Or, my favorite, "Which is the good one?" These questions imply that each twin's character traits are defined as the opposite of those of his twin brother. Of course this is not the case—they are individuals, and each child is complete on his own.

Any individual can be similar to another in some respects and different in other ways. Everybody, whether born as a twin or not, desires to be treated as an individual. Parents of all twins, identical or same-sex twins more so, need to think about this on a daily basis. You're a busy parent and it may be quicker or more efficient at times to treat your twins as a unit, but I encourage you to treat your twins as 2 children who happen to have been born on the same day.

A great way to treat your twins as individuals is to read their bedtime stories to them individually at night. When our twin boys were babies and toddlers, we were operating in survival mode, so we usually read to them simultaneously. As the years progressed and our twins were easier to care for, we saw that it would benefit both boys to have their bedtime stories read to them one-on-one. Reading to each twin separately boosts early reading skills and creates a calmer atmosphere in which to quiet down and settle in with a good book. The time and work to read to your twins individually is well worth the effort. The twins don't distract each other and they get a lot more out of the experience. Try to alternate which twin reads with which parent each night. Be realistic, though, and on late nights or if one parent is handling bedtime solo, gather everyone to snuggle up for the bedtime stories.

Twins know how to share well, having shared their parents with each other since they were newborns, but expecting twins to share all their things all the time is unrealistic. You'll want to have a system to give each child her own personal space. Even if your twins share a bedroom, you can provide each twin with a distinctly colored box that they can keep their special things in—a rock collection, a favor from a friend's party, whatever they decide is important to them.

Remind each twin to respect their siblings' personal space—older and younger siblings' space as well, as twins can outnumber an older brother and confiscate a special toy by sheer manpower alone. Give each twin her own distinct-looking piggy bank to collect loose coins. Institute a house rule that you can only check your own piggy bank's contents!

In your living and play areas, create separate play stations so that there are interesting things to do at different places in the home—one twin can play Lincoln Logs in one area while the other goes in the other room to listen to a kids' CD player. Don't expect your twins to play with the same items all the time. Give each child some space and breathing room, and your days will be more harmonious.

On birthdays and holidays, give each child distinctive presents. At 3 and 4 years of age, each child has particular interests—pick up on these differences and use them as inspiration for giving separate gifts. Adult twins groan when they remember all the times that they received 2 of the same item, maybe in different colors. When our twins were 3 years old, we noticed that sharks fascinated Ryan and Andrew was interested in fire trucks, so on their birthday we ran with these themes. The shark-themed books and toys lived on as Ryan's, and Andrew's new fire truck was Andrew's. Emphasize to gift-giving family members to look for distinctive gifts for your twins—they'll likely appreciate a little coaching.

All toys that enter your home will eventually get shared extensively—after all, playing with all the cumulative toys, rather than just your own portion, is more fun! But initially, on gift-giving occasions, give each child at least a day or his new toy before he is expected to share with others. After the first couple of days or a period that seems appropriate, the new items can become part of the public domain, fair game for all.

If your twins are squabbling over who gets to play with a new item, use the egg timer trick. Give each child a timed turn with the toy, and rotate turns. The egg timer helps reassure your twins that the turns will be fair. [Back to Top](#)

Another way to emphasize each twin's individuality is to assign a signature color to each child. At the preschool age kids usually have preferred colors—use these colors for clothes, coats, toothbrushes, and backpacks to clearly indicate who the owner is and streamline the process of getting ready each day. The more distinct the twins' personal items are, the less confusion as to whose coat is whose will occur. Ah, family harmony.

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