There is evidence that the presence of siblings minimizes the trauma of parental separations or losses. Siblings may be transitional objects for one another during placement. Separating siblings can make it more difficult for children to deal with separation and loss, begin a healing process, make attachments, and develop a healthy self image. Attachments are particularly strong between the caregiver child and the younger siblings. Separation of them may lead to lifelong grief.

Vera Fahlberg, *A Child’s Journey Through Placement*
In a review of closed cases...

- No notation of sibling visits in any of the records
- When siblings were placed together in foster care the mean placement duration was shorter (13 mos) than for those not placed with siblings (17.9 mos)


That is why we can never really lose them, or we have lost our history, our past, a part of ourselves that we cannot do without.

Siblings Kelsh & Quindlen

In a study of ninety children (ages 8-14) removed from birth parents...

- The children reported they were not prepared for a sibling split nor were they told about it.
- Most children did not become aware that they would be separated...until the first child was dropped off...While children may be able to understand why they were separated from their parents...separation from the sibling was incomprehensible.

Folman, Rosalind. "I was Taken": How Children Experience Removal from Their Parents Preliminary to Placement into Foster Care. Adoption Quarterly Vol 2 1998.
As adoption records are becoming more accessible, social workers are finding out that requests for information about siblings outnumber the requests for information about biological parents.

Ignorance regarding the importance of the sibling relationship

The family is too large.
Foster/Adoptive parents are not available.

Children’s behaviors are too difficult.

Birth Family
Therapists

Residential Treatment Centers

Social Workers
Agency/System Shortcomings

Legal Issues

The child is attached where he/she is.
I love him
not because I oughter...
but because blood
is thicker than water.

Caroline Kennedy to Brother John on his 11th birthday

Disruption

- No clear statistics re disruption rates of siblings... some show higher risk some show lower risk... higher risk correlates with same age birth children in home (Rosenthal 1993)
- No disruption among 47 children in sib groups if no other children in the home (Barth and Berry 1990)
- 1991 British study indicates risk is higher only when children are placed who are the similar age to birth children (Lahti 1982)

What are the implications for practice of these statistics?

Visiting Separated Siblings

- At least two face to face visits a month
- Use email or instant messaging contact
- Use the mail frequently
- Allow child to call on phone. If long distance, buy phone cards
- Exchange pictures twice a year
- Share important life events...vacations, birthdays, holidays, school programs
- Respect the culture, parenting and schedules of the other family

Regina M Kupecky LSW
Sibling Myth One

We will separate them and they will visit and their bond will remain.

Reality:
This seldom happens. Adoptive families may grow distant. A few visits a year will not retain the strong bond.

Sibling Myth Two

They never talk about each other so they do not care.

Reality:
Sometimes if the adults do not talk about siblings the children feel the topic is ‘forbidden.’ Start talking and listening to the children involved.

Sibling Myth Three

No one wants them.

Reality:
Children specific recruitment needs to be tried before this can be said. We need to maintain and support sibling bonds when possible.
Sibling Myth Four

We can just move the little one from the foster parent who wants to adopt and there will be no effect.

Reality: This has proven to be false. Just because a child cannot talk does not mean there is no damage.

Sibling Myth Five

All siblings belong together.

Reality: Making the decision re siblings is a very complex issue and the adults owe the children thoughtful, informed, caring decisions based on the best interests of the child(ren).

Contact Information

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