

A New Sibling's Effect on the Family

Presented by: Sue Badeau
NYSCCC Conference
May 2007

Topics for Discussion

- **What is a Family?**
- **Becoming a Family: Blending Siblings in an Adoptive Family**
- **Importance of the Sibling Bond**
- **The Sibling Experience for Children in Foster Care**
- **Tips and Tools for Parents**

What is a Family – Your Definition

- *How are families today the same as or different from families when you were growing up?*
- *When your parents grew up?*
- *What does a typical family of 2007 look like?*
- *How does the media portray the “typical” family?*
- *How important is it to you for your family to “look” a certain way?*



What is a Family?

We all come from families. Families are big, small, extended, nuclear, multi_ generational, with one parent, two parents, and grandparents. We live under one roof or many. A family can be as temporary as a few weeks, or as permanent as forever. We become part of a family by birth, adoption, marriage, or from a desire for mutual support.

As family members, we nurture, protect, and influence each other. Families have strengths that flow from individual members and from the family as a whole. Each family is a culture unto itself, with unique values and its own way of realizing dreams. Together, our families are the source of our rich cultural heritage and spiritual diversity. Our families create neighborhoods, communities, states, and nations.

(adapted from a statement prepared by the New Mexico Coalition for Youth and Families, and the New Mexico Young Children's Continuum, 1990.)

Adoption Changes a Family Forever

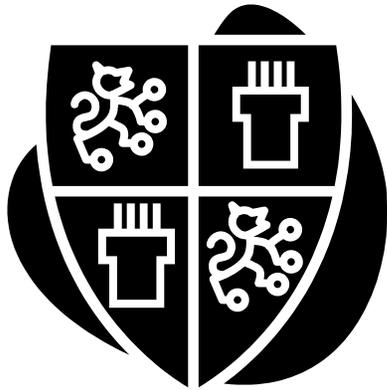
- Marriage Analogy
 - Inlaws, Outlaws
 - Bonds of Blood and Glue
 - Who sits at the table?



If our Family were a Meal



Go ahead, try this at home



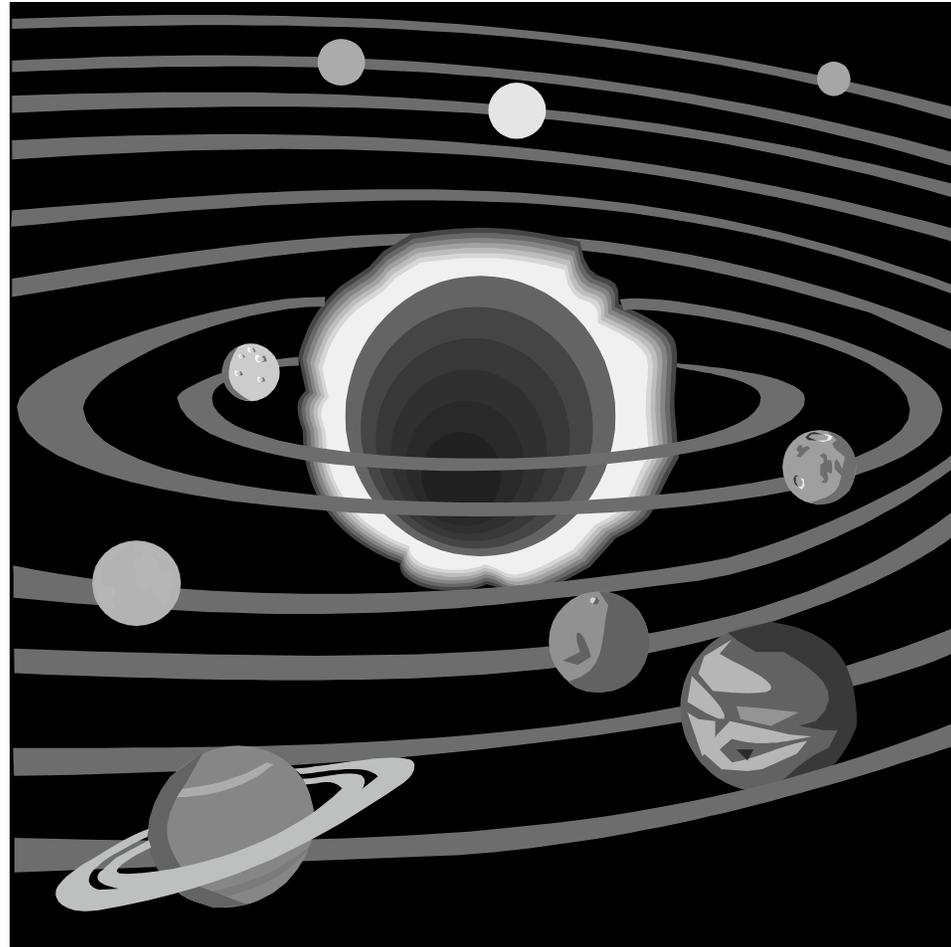
- Families pick up traits over the generations. List all the words commonly used to describe your family's inherited personality. For example: one family may be variously thought of as: hard_working, intellectual, responsible, tough, eclectic, honest, religious, athletic, etc.
- If you were to design a "Crest" or "Coat of Arms" or "Flag" for your family, what symbols would be on it? (You may write out an answer, or draw your imagined emblems) Why?

Family Identity Includes:

- **History**
- **Cultural heritage**
- **Shared memories/traditions**
- **Values/atmosphere**
- **Goals**



Family Eco-Map



Siblings – What do they mean to you?



- Write down the names of your siblings
- Do a free-association – write down 2 or 3 words that come to mind when you think of each sibling – OR
- Draw a picture that describes your relationship with a sibling
- If you do not have siblings, you can choose to use a cousin or close friend for this exercise, or write or draw the feelings you have about not having siblings
- **SHARE** and discuss with you partner

Importance of the Sibling Bond –

1. The Sibling Relationship is Unique

- The sibling relationship is unique. It is longer lasting and more influential than any other, including those with parents, spouse or children
- Describe some ways you think sibling relationships are unique



Importance of the Sibling Bond

2. Siblings Play Many Roles



- Siblings can be comforters, caretakers, role models, motivators, faithful allies and best friends.
- What roles have siblings played in your own life? What role have you played in the lives of your siblings?

Importance of the Sibling Bond

3. Sibling Relationships Effect Adult Behavior

- In the past it was assumed that parent-child relationships sowed the seeds of identity and adult behavior, but there is growing awareness that the interplay between siblings also exerts a powerful life-long force.
- How do you think your experience with siblings has shaped your own identity, behavior, personality?



The Importance of the Sibling Bond

4. Siblings help children develop social skills



- The social skills children acquire from their relationships with their brothers and sisters extend beyond the home, influencing interactions with peers.
- For example, through games and conversations with each other, young children learn such skills as helping, sharing and cooperating.
- Can you think of other specific examples of how sibling relationships can help social growth?

The Importance of the Sibling Bond

5. Sibling Relationships Change but remain important over a Lifetime

- In early childhood, siblings are constant companions and playmates -the sibling relationship influences social and cognitive learning.
- During adolescence, once-close siblings may temporarily weaken their ties as they exert their individuality and independence. This is to be expected.



The Importance of the Sibling Bond

5. Sibling Relationships Change but remain important over a Lifetime (cont)



- In adulthood, the needs of their families usually take precedence over the relationship with each other, but the sibling ties often emerge stronger as they share their adult struggles and triumphs with each other.
- The sibling bond comes full circle in old age, when parents & spouse may be gone and their children are raising families. The bond between them often intensifies as they once again become each other's companions, sometimes living together for the remainder of their lives.

Sibling Experience for Children in Foster Care



- There are over 500,000 children in foster care in the US.
- 55-69% have siblings, 30% have 4 or more siblings.
- 61% of children with siblings are placed with at least one sibling; this is the good news.

Sibling Experience for Children in Foster Care, cont

- However, only 38% of children with siblings are placed with ALL of their siblings.
- Current estimates indicate that 75% of sibling groups end up living apart after they enter foster care.
- For most of them, it means losing the only significant relationship they have known.

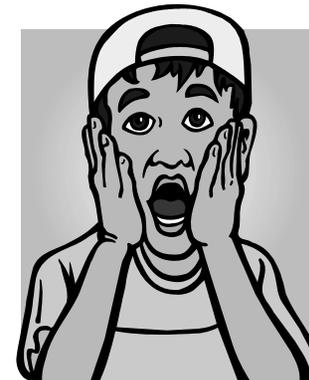
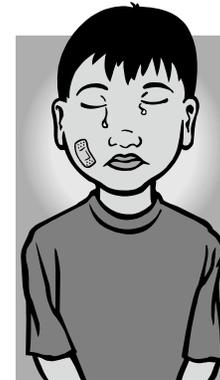


Sibling Experience for Children in Foster Care

- For children whose parents are unable to meet their needs, the sibling bond may become stronger.
- The sibling bond is especially strong when siblings are neglected by parents and an older sibling becomes a caregiver or when the siblings must mutually depend on each other to get their needs met.
- Children in these families learn to depend on each other to cope with their common life experiences.

Sibling Experience for Children in Foster Care

- Separating siblings in foster care or through adoption adds to their emotional burden
- Studies have shown that even babies experience depression when they re separated from their brothers and sisters.
- Brothers and sisters separated in foster care experience trauma, anger and an extreme sense of loss. Research suggests that separating siblings may make it difficult for them to begin a healing process, form attachments and develop a healthy self-image



Sibling Experience for Children in Foster Care



- Children form sibling attachments with their foster siblings and these ties are important to respect
- How can these ties be maintained?

Tips and Tools for Parents

1. Get support

- Take advantage of offered support services. If the children are having difficulties getting along, ask for sibling therapy; don't just rely on individual treatment.
- Consider family therapy.
- Find a mentor family; ask your worker to introduce you to others parenting blended families and parents of sibling groups.



Tips and Tools for Parents

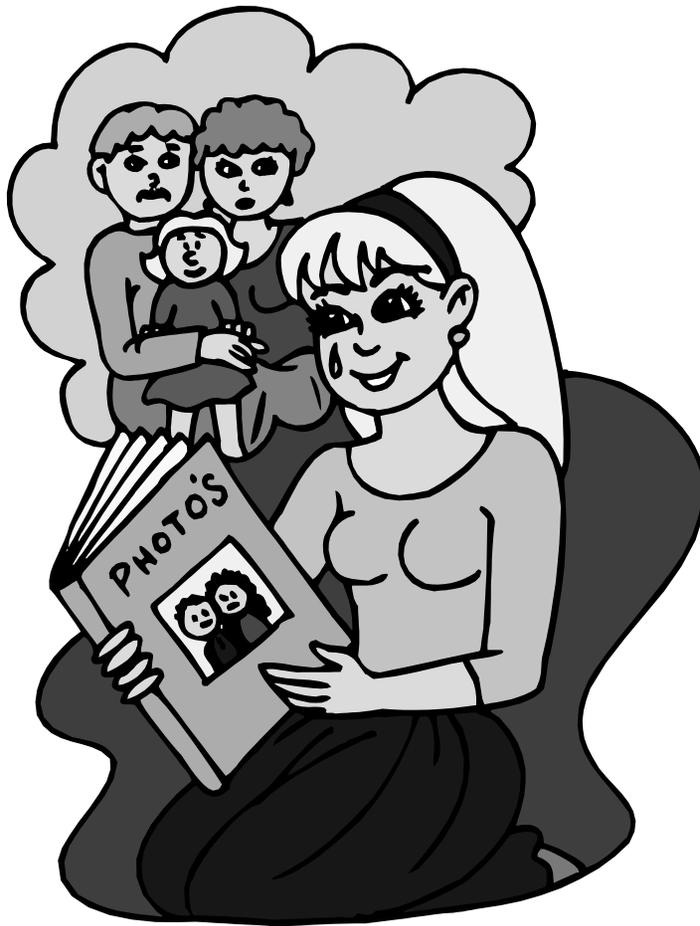
2. Meeting Individual Needs of Children

- Plan special time for each child and subgroup
- Provide individual space (bedroom, closet, locker)
- Provide strategies for extended family to be involved
- Be deliberate about helping children create new alliances and attachments (Abel/Jose)



Tips and Tools for Parents

3. Honor Children's Past



- Help children create lifebooks to link past, present and future
- Honor issues around naming (JD & Abel)
- Respect caretaking roles, while helping oldest gradually let go of that role
- Become friends with their former families

Tips and Tools for Parents

4. Family Building

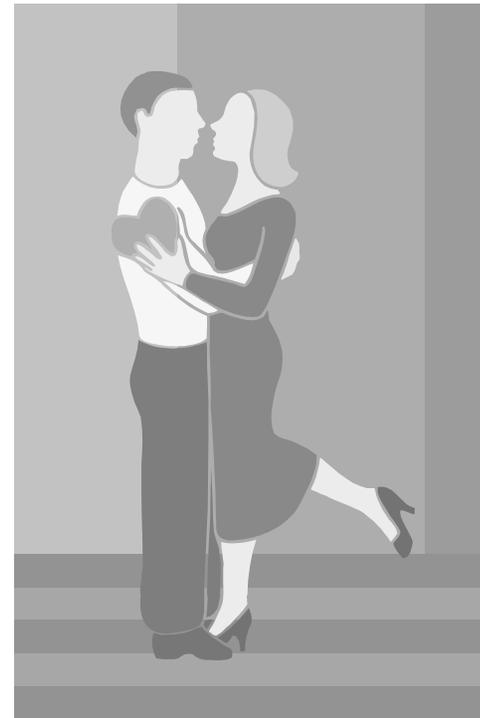


- Use identity building activities to create a family bond
- Create new traditions while honoring old
- Honor all holidays & cultures (Renee)
- Be deliberate about creating family time

Tips and Tools for Parents

5. Keeping Yourself Healthy

- Don't forget about the needs of adult relationships
- Develop stress-busting and respite opportunities
- Maintain your own physical health
- Understand that parenting a new sibling is difficult. Don't be afraid to ask for help.



Tips and Tools for Parents

6. Create a Toolkit for the Journey of Life

- Relationship-building tools (communication, touch, intimacy)
- Anger Management & Stress busting tools
- Problem Solving & Creative Thinking Tools
- Advocacy (& Self Advocacy) tools
- Relaxation, laughter & recreational tools
- Our own “AAA” club plan – looking upward and outward



When Siblings are Separated

Issues for Families

- Engage in activities such as family-to-family visits, joint lunches/dinners, having children play soccer together, etc.
 - Babysit or provide respite for one another
 - Continue ongoing contact even after one or more children are placed permanently
 - Be open to adding the sibs at a later time
- 
- Set up ways for children to communicate with one another, such as phone calls, cards and letters, daily email, Instant messaging, webcam, etc.

And most of all

Listen to the Children

