

Twins and triplets at school -Tips for parents of multiple children

To the same or different class?

The parents of twins, triplets and quadruplets are often concerned whether their children are seen as individuals at school. In other words, should they begin their school at the same or in different classes, or would a small group be a more beneficial option. In some counties the only option is the same class, as no alternatives of parallel classes are available.

However, there is no general or one correct answer to the class selection matter since the choice will be made for each family separately. The Finnish law does not include an article to indicate that multiple children should be placed in the same or separate groups at school. Instead, the children and parents wish to be heard when making decisions. The best solution should be found together with the children, the preschool, the teacher, the class teacher and/or the principal.

Therefore, an automatic response to the question whether multiple siblings should always be placed into the same or different class, cannot be given. This question should be considered in each family's case separately.

The research points out that a certain choice of class does not have a significant effect on the child's individual development, academic success, cognitive development or on the behavior at school. In some cases, a certain choice of class can be more reasoned than in another.

Situations supporting the same class option:

- If the twins themselves strongly resist starting the school in different classes, there is no need to cause them psychic pain by separating them to different classes.
- If there is a recent major change that has emerged in the lives of the children, such as moving out or a divorce.
- If there are no three classes available, there is no need to place one of the triplets to another class, while the two others are placed in the same class, since the one left alone may feel abandoned from the others.

The different class option is supported in situation wherein:

- One sibling is dominant to the extent of which it weakens the self-esteem of the other sibling.

The decision is presumably right when it feels good to the children, parents, and the teacher. The decision should be annually reviewed. Regarding what would be the best for the child is that an eventual change should be timed in a period, wherein changes would come out anyway.

Starting school in different years? To a special needs class?

From the child's perspective it is not recommended to start the school in different years, especially because the child that starts the school at last, may experience it negatively.

If there are minor delays in the child's development, the help may often be found in other kinds of solutions. If the delay in the development is major, a class for children with special needs may be considered. The evidence shows that when the child is placed in a class with children with similar needs, it strengthens the self-esteem of the child.

Mutual comparison

Each child's development should be individually monitored. A constant comparison may weaken self-esteem, and children already tend to compare themselves in different situations.

It is not appropriate to hide one's success from another, as life itself constantly offers opportunities to compare one's performances. It is important for a child to experience oneself as an individual, free from constant competition against others.

Tips for parents to support the individuality of multiple children

Being a multiple child forms a natural part of the identity of a multiple child. It is not something a multiple child should get rid of to enable one to develop into one's own person. The mutual relationship is very concise especially in childhood and youth. The mutual dependence decreases by age. A good balance emerges from the moments where the multiple children are offered a possibility to individual experiences. Supporting individual growth stands in the pivotal role in growing up as a multiple child. It is important that the parents, children and teachers could discuss together on how to best support the individuality of multiple children at school. Best practices are found by thinking of these all together.

- Discuss the child's personal characteristics with the teacher
- Tell the teacher, that supporting individuality is important
- Encourage the children to spend time apart from each other as well
- Compliment and listen to children separately and provide them enough time to express themselves
- Take one-on-one time to help each child separately with his/her homework
- Propose different hairstyles to your children. Remember also different colors and styles of clothes, school bags and stationery.

To the junior high and to upper secondary

When transferring from elementary school to upper secondary, the class choice should be reviewed on each child case separately. If possible, when proceeding to upper secondary, a child's own interests should be the central criteria when making a choice of class. According to a Finnish study, especially twin boys did not make educational decisions, or they made very similar decisions, because of mutual dependence and because they did not want to take separate educational paths from each other. Therefore, it is important to practice independent decision making and action taking already as a child in elementary school.

More information can be found in *Twins and triplets at school -guide (in finnish) (www.monikkoperheet.fi)*. This is a summary of that guide. Translated by Ulla Ceesay. The guide is published by Finnish Multiple Births Association (Suomen Monikkoperheet ry), edited by Ulla Kumpula, illustrated by Anne Muhonen and folded by Tiina Matala. The specialist workgroup was M.Ed Suvi Alamaa, PhD Kristiina Heinonen, B.Ed Nelli Helle, M.Soc.Sc Ulla Kumpula, M.Ed Hanna Lenkola, bachelor of Social Services Elina Santala and M.Ed Virpi Vuolteenaho. The guide was edited by MD, PhD Irma Moilanen. The international research review was made by B.Ed Nelli Helle.

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