

Twins and triplets at school -Tips for teachers

To the same or different class?

There is no universal or one correct answer to the class selection matter since the choices will be made for each family separately. The preschool teacher and class teacher should together with the parents and children, consider what would be the best decision for each family. An automatic response to the question if the multiple children should always be placed in the same or different class, cannot be given. The Finnish law does not include an article or advice which would indicate that multiple children should always be placed in the same or separate groups at school. Rather so, that the wishes of children and parents are heard when making these decisions.

The research shows that a certain choice of class (same class / different class) does not improve the individual development, academic success, cognitive development or behavior of multiple children at school. In some cases a certain choice of class may be more reasoned than in another case.

Situations supporting the same class are:

- 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?

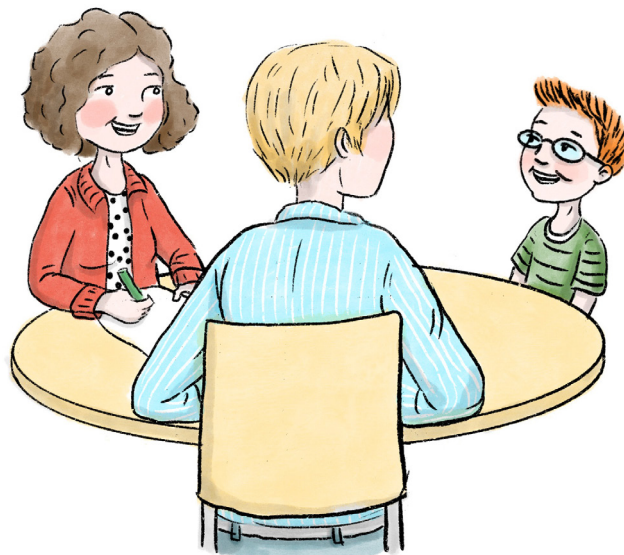
From the child's perspective it is not recommended to start the school in different years, especially because the child that starts the school at last, may experience it negatively. If there are minor delays in the child's development, the help may often be found in other kinds of solutions. If the delay 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.

Tips for teachers to support individuality of multiple children

- Learn to identify the children individually.
- If identifying is challenging, find solutions with the parents and children by discussing with them.
- Request parents to tell you about each child separately, in order to receive information on each one's personal characteristics and solutions for possible challenges in identifying.
- 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.
- Always include the parents and children to think of how to support for example the individual development and group choices. Common conversation is an essential support in the individual growth of a multiple child.
- Make the group choice for each twin, triplet/quadruplet separately, while remaining in discussion.
- Listen to each child alone and allow the child enough time to express oneself.
- Pay attention to the points of interest of each child, for example when making a choice for a music class. (Please note, siblings may also have same points of interests).
- Compliment individually.
- Support the child to make individual friendships.
- Call the children by their own names, not as twins/ triplets/ quadruplets.
- Focus your communication to that child to whom you are currently talking to.
- Placing multiple children in different areas in class will aid you in identifying, avoiding comparison and competition. It also provides the children with an opportunity to express themselves and be heard as individuals.
- Distribute info material for each child separately.
- Find personal characteristics in the personality, behavior, body structure, handwriting or voice (however not a type of characteristic which is negatively experienced by the child).
- Schedule separate appointments for each individual child, for example during the same day, on a one- after- another basis.
- Think together with the parents and children of appropriate solutions as how to identify children who look alike (suggest for example different styles of clothes or hairstyles).
- Divide the children into different workgroups / share groups.
- Point out some activities offered by schools' hobby clubs so that the children have an opportunity to try out and find their own individual hobby.
- Do not compare multiple children's performances with one another. Continuous comparison may have a weakening effect on the self-esteem of the children.
- The development may be mutually similar or different, however, there should not be any expectation for the study results, accuracy or behavior to be similar.

Co-operation

When transferring from the elementary school to the upper secondary, the central criteria in the process of a class- and school selection is the multiple children's own area of interest, if possible. The interdependence of multiple children may later affect their study plans if the siblings want to do everything together. It might even occur that the choice making will be postponed. Therefore, it is important to practice independent decision making and action taking already as a child at school. Best practices will be discovered by discussing together. More information on cooperation will be found in *Twins and triplets at school-* guide (in Finnish), www.monikkoperheet.fi.



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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