

## **Separating siblings leads to identity-formation problems and a lost sense of stability and belonging.**

- Bjørn Øystein Angel, *Foster Children's Sense of Sibling Belonging: The Significance of Biological and Social Ties*, 4(1) SAGE Open (2014), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2158244014529437>

This article examines children's perceived sense of belonging to siblings and how their social and biological ties develop their identities as they move into, and sometimes out of, the foster care system. The majority of children involved in the study said that continued relationships with their biological siblings was important for their identity and sense of belonging. Interviews conducted with children in the study also showed that "[c]aring about biological siblings, rivalry and conflict with biological siblings, or having to compare oneself with the foster parents' own children strengthens the children's perception of themselves and their identity, and a sense of belonging becomes a central feature." The author concludes with several practical implications from his findings. First, he urges child welfare services to acknowledge the importance of getting to know each individual child and his or her sibling relationships, before and during the processing of placing the child in a foster home. Second, he stresses this perspective must be maintained throughout the entire period the child is in foster care.

- Laurie Kramer, et al., *Siblings*, Ch. 29, in B. H. Fiese, ed., *APA Handbook of Contemporary Family Psychology* (2019), [https://www.depts.ttu.edu/hs/hdfs/research/sibs/docs/Siblings-APA-Handbook-Contemporary-Families\\_proofs.pdf](https://www.depts.ttu.edu/hs/hdfs/research/sibs/docs/Siblings-APA-Handbook-Contemporary-Families_proofs.pdf)

This chapter examines how sibling relationships can help promote resilient families. With respect to placement of siblings in foster care specifically, the authors discuss how growing literature reflects that maintaining sibling relationships through joint placement or other means can provide many developmental benefits, including greater competence in education, occupation, housing, relationships, and civic engagement. "Furthermore, for adolescents in foster care, sibling relationship qualities, such as support, positively predicted aspects of self-concept including acceptance, self-efficacy, psychological maturity, and activity, with the amount of contact with siblings magnifying the strength of these associations." *Id.* at 5 (internal citations omitted).

- Jonathan Caspi, *Sibling Development: Implications for Mental Health Practitioners* 322 (Springer Pub. 2011)

This article is a review of existing literature. Authors find that siblings can be a source of "significant social and emotional support, especially during difficult circumstances...[and] having access to and shared experiences with siblings may help sustain family continuity and identity after children are removed from their family of origin. Sibling relations may be of special importance to children from minority populations in preserving their ethnic identity, particularly children placed in families or communities that differ considerably from their own heritage." Given the importance and benefits of sibling relationships, the authors note that best

practices call for placing siblings together and for promoting sibling contact when they cannot be together.

- Susan L. Smith, *Siblings in Foster Care and Adoption: What We Know from Research*, in Deborah N. Silverstein & Susan L. Smith, Eds., *Siblings in Adoption and Foster Care: Traumatic Separations and Honored Connections* (Praeger Pub. 2009), <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2009-11027-000>

This book chapter discusses research about sibling relationships and implications for child-welfare practices. With respect to identity formation, the author states that “[c]ontinuity of sibling relationships through conjoint placements helps children to maintain a positive sense of identity and knowledge of their cultural, personal, and family histories. They provide natural support to each other and some sense of stability and belonging. . . thus validating the child’s fundamental sense of self-worth.” *Id.* at 20 (internal citations omitted).