

Sibling Relationships in Foster Care

Keeping Them Connected

Deanna Prezioso, MSW, LSW

Approximately 2/3rds of children in the foster care system have at least one sibling who is also in care.

-AdoptUSKids

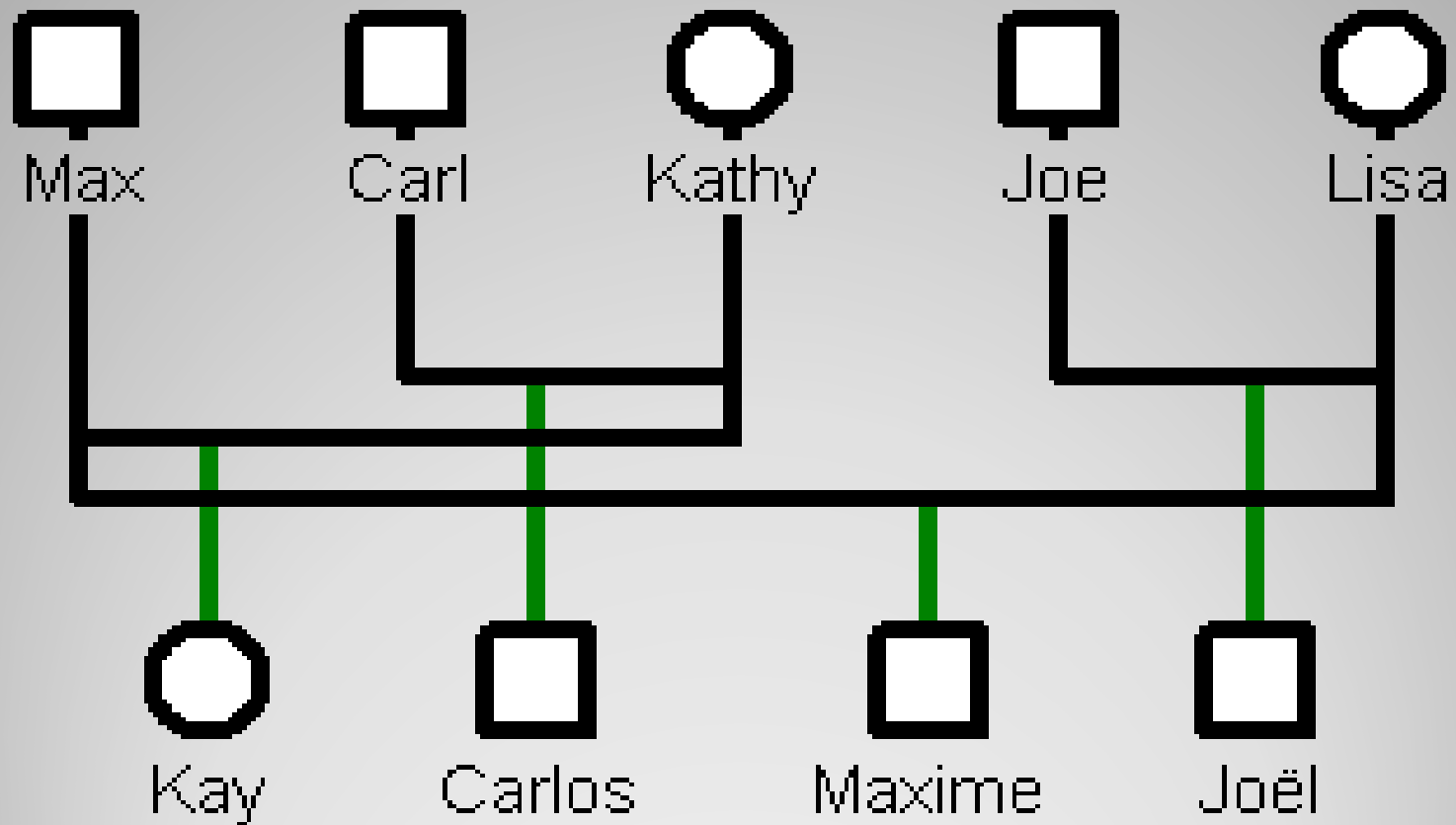
**More than half of those
siblings are separated from
each other.**

-AdoptUSKids

Family

- Dr. Murray Bowen – Family Systems Theory
 - **Family** = a system of **interdependent** individuals that constitute a **whole that is greater than the sum of its parts**.
 - Individuals best understood as part of their family system.

Unique Family Dynamics



Defining Siblings

- **Full/Whole** – share same mother and father
- **Half** – share same mother OR father
- **Step** – parents are different but married to each other
- **Psychological** – no actual sibling status, but living as siblings – “fictive kin”
- **Adoptive**

Sibling relationship dynamics

- Role in identity development & adjustment
- Longest relationship in life

Effects of maltreatment on sibling relationships

- Strengthening of sibling bond
- Disruption of sibling bond
- Parentification of children

"If it wasn't me being abused then it was me seeing my brother being abused, which was more difficult for me," she said. "I felt strong enough to endure the abuse as long as my brother didn't have to go through it, and so I would always try to be there, like after school. I would try to make sure I got home and was just there with my brother to make sure he was OK." Marchelle Roberts



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=muBgWBVuD9c>

Placement of sibling groups in foster care - WHY?

- Separating them causes additional trauma
- Being separated from siblings can trigger grief, anxiety and depression

WHY?

- Joint siblings placements experience less disruptions than separated siblings or placement of single children
- Siblings placed together experience fewer reported emotional and behavioral concerns, better mental health and socialization, & increased feelings of emotional support and closeness in foster family relationships
- School performance of siblings placed together is better than school performance for separated siblings

WHY?

- Siblings provide a familial and cultural connection that may not be present in the foster and/or adoptive family.
- Siblings provide a sense of identity and belonging to each other.

WHY?

- If siblings are placed together while in care, they are more likely to be successful in reunification.

In Their Words

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E9uoqOWHosg>

In Their Words

- Sibling groups in the system explain their lives and placement in terms of which siblings they were placed with in which home.

In Their Words

- Siblings report being connected to their siblings while in foster care as their number one priority (Foster Youth in Action, 2017)

BARRIERS

- Lack of placement options that can accommodate the whole sibling group.
- Size of sibling group
- Age gap between siblings

BARRIERS

- Individual needs of children within the sibling group.
- Adequacy of placement resources and supports
- Entering care at different times

Maintaining sibling connections

If sibling groups are placed together initially they have a 79% chance of staying together

If they have to be separated at initial placement they have a 51% chance of ending up together

The more time that passes with them in separate homes, the more likely they will remain separated

Recommended Strategies to Overcome Barriers

Shift decision making from “the best interests of the child”

TO.....

"the best interest of the adult the child will become"



Recommended Strategies to Overcome Barriers

- At regular case reviews, discuss sibling issues
- **Ask youth** about their siblings
- Ensure that information about siblings is included in each child's Lifebook
- Ask for contact information for foster caregivers/kinship families who have the other siblings

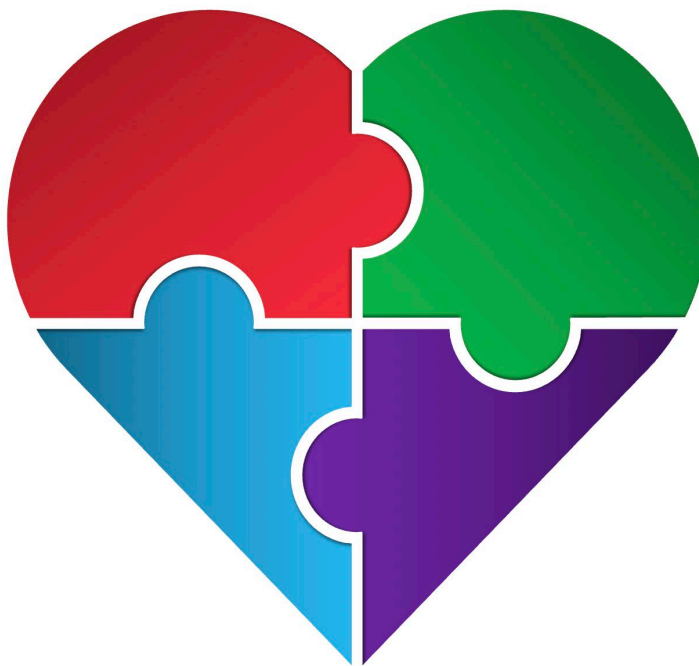
Supporting Sibling Connections

Visits

Connection
between separated
siblings matters.

Schedule

Coordinate
schedules using
Doodle Poll or
another tool.



Tech Tools

Use Zoom or
another platform if
youth are unable
to meet in person.

Prioritize

Recognize that
sibling connections
deeply matter to
young people.

**fosteractionohio | Foster care
youth, alumni and resources**

A former foster kid, now a dad himself,
helps keep a family together by adopting 5
siblings - CBS News



References

- Barth, R.P., Lloyd, E., Green, R.L., James, S., Leslie, L.K., & Landsverk, J. (2007). Predictors of placement moves among children with and without emotional and behavioral disorders. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 15(1), 46-55.
- Child Welfare Information Gateway (2013). *Sibling issues in foster care and adoption*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, Pub. L. No. 110-351, 122 Stat. 3949 (2008). Retrieved from LexisNexis database.
- Hegar, R. L. (2005). Sibling issues in child welfare practice. In G. Mallon and P. Hess (Eds.) *Child Welfare for the Twenty-First Century: A Handbook of Practices, Policies, and Programs*. (pp. 536-547). New York: Columbia University Press.
- James, S., Monn. A.R., Palinkas, L.A., & Leslie, L.K. (2008). Maintaining sibling relationships for children in foster and adoptive placements. *Children and Youth Service Review*, 30, 90-106.
- Linares, L.O., Li, M., Shrout, P.E., & Brody, G.H. (2007). Placement shift, sibling relationship quality, and child outcomes in foster care: a controlled study. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 21(4), 736-743. doi:10.1037/0893-3200.21.4.736

References

- McBeath, B., Kothari, B.H., Blakeslee, J., Lamson-Siu, E., Bank, L., Linare, L.O., Waid, J., Sorenson, P., Jimenez, J., Pearson, E., & Shlonsky, A. (2014). Intervening to improve outcomes for siblings in foster care: Conceptual, substantive, and methodological dimensions of a prevention science framework. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 39, 1-10.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016.j.childyouth.2013.12.004>
- McCormick, A. (2010). Siblings in foster care: An overview of research, policy, and practice. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, 4(2), 198-212.
- McHale, S.M., Updegraff, K.A., & Whiteman, S.D., (2012). Sibling relationships and influences in childhood and adolescence. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 74(5), 913-930.
- Miron, D., Ayesha, S., & Middleton, M. (2013). Considering the best interests of infants in foster care placed separately from their siblings. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 35, 1385-1392,
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016./j.childyouth.20136.05.008>

References

- Pollet, T.V., & Nettle, D. (2009). Birth order and adult family relationships: Firstborns have better sibling relationships than laterborns. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 26(8), 1029-1046.
doi:10.1177/0265407509347940
- Shlonsky, A., Bellamy, J., Elkins, J., & Ashare, C.J. (2005). The other kin: Setting the course for research, policy, and practice with siblings in foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 27, 697- 716.
- Silles, M.A. (2010). The implications of family size and birth order for test score and behavioral development. *Economics of Education Review*, 29, 795-803.
- Washington, K. (2007). Research review: Sibling placement in foster care: A review of the evidence. *Child and Family Social Work*, 12, 426-433. .
- Wojciak, A.S., McWey, L.M., & Helfrich, C.M., (2013). Sibling relationships and internalizing symptoms of youth in foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 35, 1071-1077.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2013.04.021>

References

- Wulczyn, F., & Zimmerman, E. (2005). Sibling placements in longitudinal perspective. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 27(7), 765-782.

Maintaining sibling connections

What you can do

- **EDUCATE & ADVOCATE!!**

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR
ADVOCACY FOR OUR
CHILDREN!**

COMMENTS & QUESTIONS