

Tips for new Parents with Twins

An open letter from a twin!

by Marie Cash

Marie Cash As a recent college graduate, Marie has a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Northern Colorado. She enjoys reading, writing and baking new recipes for her food blog. Marie has a fraternal twin named Kathy. They are best friends and both live in Colorado. Someday they want to attend the Twins Day Festival in Twinsburg, Ohio.



Dear New Mom and Dad of Twins:

Expecting twins for the first time? Parenting twins can be stressful, but it can also be one of the best experiences of your lives. I have a twin sister; we are fraternal twins. Twenty-one years ago, my parents found out they were expecting twins during the first ultrasound. It was quite the surprise for them! They were excited but also worried about having double of everything. My sister and I were born 11 weeks premature. Because of our early arrival, my parents had to quickly prepare for double the amount of baby clothes, the messes and the future expenses. But, there was also double the amount of fun and love that had to be provided.

Preparing for twins can be demanding, but it is important for parents to be ready when the twins arrive. Joan A. Friedman, a psychotherapist and twin expert from southern California, says parents can prepare for having twins by developing expectations

that are realistic. Parents will be busy and stressed, so they need to set some time aside to relax. Friedman says parents should work together to make parenting more efficient.

"Work out with your partner beforehand how you will attempt to help each other during these difficult early months," Friedman says.

To prepare for having twins, my parents also had realistic expectations. They knew that they would have to think about the little aspects, including buying enough diapers and balancing feeding times. My mother says the first few nights after my sister and I came home from the hospital, my father kept insisting that since he had to go to work the next day, he needed his sleep. My mother got up and fed both of us. But, when she fed us, she also woke my father up, so he didn't get much sleep anyway.

"What we ended up doing was both getting up and each feeding a baby, and then we went back to bed and slept until it was

time to feed the babies again. That worked much better than the first approach."

It is also important that parents know they can ask for help. Friedman says parents should not be afraid to ask others around them for help when caring for twins.

"Don't be reluctant as you will need extra laps and hands," Friedman says.

Ask a relative to help out with the twins once a week, or ask a friend to spend a few hours with one of the twins. My grandparents pitched in when they could even though they lived a few hours away. My mother says my grandma came to help right after we came home from the hospital. She also visited sometimes during the day to babysit, so my parents got a chance to eat out or go shopping.

There are also many useful resources for new parents, including books about twins, twins' clubs, pediatricians and talking with other parents who are raising twins. Friedman says new parents should not be hard on themselves; it is okay to feel overwhelmed sometimes. She says parents should do what they think is best when it comes down to their parenting style.

"It is about surviving and doing a good enough job, not a perfect one."

My parents talked to a pediatrician and found him to be very helpful. He was a twin himself, which added to his knowledge of twins. He gave my parents many tips about baby nutrition and tips on how to care for twins when both babies become sick.

"The family pediatrician, Dr. Stein, told us which medicines to give to the girls," says my mother. "He was especially helpful when you girls got pink eye multiple times."

Another key piece of advice is to expect that new parents will both be tired and overwhelmed at first. My parents created a schedule to balance different tasks.

"I would take out the trash and fill up the bottles, while Mom changed diapers and dressed the girls," says my father. "Although I was exhausted at first, it got easier once we figured out a routine."

According to The Twin Coach, a website created by Gina Osher, a mother of twins, new parents should stay calm and talk to other parents of multiples. By reaching out and conversing with other parents, parents can become more knowledgeable about twins and learn about ways to provide the best care for their twins. My family lived next door to twin boys who were four years older than we were. We became close with our neighbors, and my mother got a lot of free parenting advice from their mother.

In addition, Friedman says it is important to spend alone time with each twin in order to get to know him or her individually. As twins grow older, parents can see their differences and they can work to treat their twins as individuals.

My parents tried to treat my sister and me as individuals. As toddlers, my parents dressed us differently and encouraged us to spend time with other children.

KEY TIPS FOR PARENTS OF TWINS

- ✓ Remember to relax
- ✓ Talk to other parents of twins
- ✓ Fill your bookcase with twin books and utilize online resources (blogs, informational sites)
- ✓ It is ok to ask for help (family members and friends are willing to help you out!)
- ✓ Encourage individuality for your twins
- ✓ Consider joining a twins club (www.nomotc.org)
- ✓ Read Friedman's book *Emotionally Healthy Twins: A New Philosophy for Parenting Two Unique Children*.

"I wanted to make sure you girls were individuals with your own personalities and interests," says my mother. "But, at the same time, I wanted you to be friends and have a good relationship."

Friedman also says that parents cannot make their twins' lives completely equal.

"Don't get caught up in the fair and equal dilemma even though your twins attempt to guilt you into such a conundrum."

Parents try to make everything fair, but it is just not possible. Each twin has different personality traits and different wants as he or she grows older. Instead of making everything fair, parents should focus on encouraging each twin to live his or her own life, so everything does not seem like it has to be equal.

Nonetheless, twins become friends because they spend a lot of time with each other. My parents encouraged my sister and me to have a close relationship. The twin relationship is a special one that twins should foster. My twin sister and I have different interests, but we are also very close; we can talk about anything with each other.

Furthermore, Friedman says parents should not focus on the "twin mystique." By doing this, parents tend to idealize what it is to be a twin. She says that parents should take note of the pros and cons of parenting twins.

Friedman recommends parents read her first book, *Emotionally Healthy Twins: A New Philosophy for Parenting Two Unique Children*. Her book provides parents with information about pregnancy with twins and raising twins.

I hope this information will help you as you begin your journey of parenting twins. Having twins will bring you double the amount of joy and memorable experiences. My parents continue to learn about twins and make new memories, even after 21 years. ♥



Best wishes,

Marie Cash, a fraternal twin