

Together or Apart: Sibling Assessments

"I don't believe an accident of birth makes people sisters or brothers. It makes them siblings, gives them mutuality of parentage. Sisterhood and brotherhood is a condition people have to work at."

Maya Angelo

"Our siblings push buttons that cast us in roles we felt sure we had let go of long ago - the baby, the peacekeeper, the caretaker, the avoider. It doesn't seem to matter how much time has elapsed or how far we've travelled".

Jane Mersky Leder

Past research seemed to demonstrate that siblings do best when they are placed together. This outcome is true, and they do...except for when they don't. Placements break down for a number of reasons and the quality and type of sibling relationship is one of those factors.

Our assessments are undertaken using a trauma lens. Within this vantage point we then look at sibling relationship within the context of the family home, the current placement(s) and what a future placement or placements may look like.

We question and explore the definition of siblings, consider the nature and duration of the sibling relationship, reflect on both legal and research findings and gather information from siblings, parents, families, carers, schools and professionals to understand the myriad of ways that sibling relationships can be viewed, understood or believed to create a clearer understanding of how that relationship is experienced. The experience of the relationship may change from place to place; care environments, schools, contact or dependent on who is present at any given moment.

The factors may include local policies, but these should never dictate what is actually right for a child. What is right for one child can sometimes be less than ideal or harmful for another. Placement resources, financial resources, the children's identity; ages, age ranges, roles, perceived roles, potential of delay for one child over another, relationship, contact needs, timings of reception into care, ethnicity, disability, health needs, educational needs and sibling status are all scrutinised alongside the children's experiences prior to being in the care system or in substitute care.

The views of the children's assessments, family assessments, care plans, care histories, transitions, the views of Guardians, reviewing officers and other experts are also carefully considered within our framework with views carefully laid out.

We establish who the siblings are, their individual experiences in relation to their ages, hierarchy within the household, temperament, character strategies, locus of control, psychometric findings and their individual needs.

The children's views are established and understood from the information they are able to give and the feelings they convey. The information not shared is as relevant as the information that is. The context within which the relationship between the siblings developed, their individual parenting experience and the attachment style that developed as a result. We identify the strengths and needs within the relationships and what can what cannot be improved. The triggers and intrusive experiences are identified and attributed to the children's symptoms.

"You are mistaken if you think we have to lower ourselves to communicate with children. On the contrary, we have to reach up to their feelings, stretch, stand on our tiptoes."

Janusz Korczak 1925



The placement viability for each of the children is then explored in relation to the adverse childhood experiences, the availability of appropriate and timely interventions and how this is likely to be experienced across the children's development.

Where the outcome is to separate one or more siblings then contact is an integral component of the assessment plan.

