

Joan A. Friedman, PhD



CONTEMPLATING COLLEGE CHOICES FOR YOUR TWINS

Many parents have contacted me feeling distressed, helpless, and puzzled about their twins' difficult adjustment to college life. One mother sadly related how one of her daughters had stopped talking to her twin sister; refusing to have anything to do with her once they arrived at college. Mother was at a loss to understand why this had happened. However, after she provided a few pertinent details, it was not difficult to understand why the girls were at odds with each other.

One of her daughters had chosen a university early on in the college process via a selection method known as early decision. Her sister had applied to this same university along with other schools. When it came time for the undecided twin to make a choice, she opted to attend the same university as her sister.

Twins have tremendous loyalty issues, which often make it difficult to voice their feelings and desires to their sibling. Naturally, the twin who had made her decision to attend the university in the first place felt terribly ambivalent about her twin's decision. She had been looking forward to a separate experience away from her twin sister. Nonetheless, she understandably recognized and respected that she did not have the right to dictate her sister's college decision.

Unfortunately, the parents had no awareness about the twins' need to have separate experiences. Mom seemed clueless about the fact that the girls might want and need time away from each other. She waxed poetically about their unstoppable twin synergy and magical intimacy. Her fascination and obsession with the "twin mystique" interfered with her capacity to recognize that the girls needed and deserved time to be on their own, to be independent, and to be **known** by others as individuals rather than as "the twins".

The first few years of college were very difficult for the girls and their family. However, with maturation and time away from one other due to semester options and study abroad programs, the sisters gradually redefined their relationship as separate young adults – not simply as twins.

I believe parents must bear the responsibility for making these life-changing decisions for their children. It is likely that one twin will yearn for separation more than the other. Most children – singletons and multiples alike – have expectable adjustment difficulties when they go to college. They must learn how to manage their independence, social relationships, and academic challenges on their own. Learning how to be on one's own is a skill that most twins have never had the opportunity to master.

So, please, while these college discussions are taking place, be aware of your twins' circumstances and attempt to do what is best for each of them. Be mindful that the initial adjustment will be fraught with problems; however, the overall future benefits will be positive, expansive, and vital in keeping your twins developmentally on course. It is unfair and unhealthy to rob twins of the experience of learning how to be on their own.▪
