



FALLING IN LOVE WITH YOUR TWINS: ONE AT A TIME

Often mothers who are pregnant with their second child have expectable feelings of trepidation about how the birth of the new baby will impact their attachment with their firstborn. Moms who have already confronted this situation reference a well-known vignette to help expectant moms develop the emotional resonance necessary to understand and manage the new family dynamics. “Think about how you would feel if your husband came home with a new wife and told you that she would be living with the two of you from now on.” All kidding aside, most family systems adjust to a new sibling in due time.

However, unlike parents of singletons awaiting a second birth, parents expecting two babies at the same time confront uniquely different challenges. Since the physical and emotional demands of caring for two infants are taxing beyond belief, they do not have the “luxury” of feeling attached to each baby right away. I have counseled many parents who express tremendous conflict about having different feelings for each baby. Yet, after these incompatible feelings are articulated and reframed within an empathic perspective, the situation can be ameliorated.

How do you fall in love with each twin simultaneously and equally? **YOU DON'T**. The goal is to love each twin “individually”. Let me share a story.

From time to time I would run into an acquaintance of mine who is the mother of 2½ year old boy/girl fraternal twins. For the most part she would share information and stories about her son, making casual references to her daughter. In our last conversation she told me how her son had begun to use the potty by himself. Naturally she was thrilled and related how she had shared the exciting news with her friends and relatives. When I inquired about her daughter, her affect switched from one of joy to concern. She spoke about her daughter’s refusal to eat dinner and about how this feeding difficulty reminded her of the eating issues that had caused concern since her daughter’s birth.

Mom and her infant son were discharged together from the hospital while her daughter remained in the NICU for a week because of low birth weight. When she did come home, mom had to take her to the doctor’s office each day to be weighed. Later on, difficulties with swallowing necessitated extensive occupational therapy to teach her daughter how to eat properly. Her daughter’s struggles made her feel helpless, inadequate, and anxious. She resented how her daughter’s arrival home made her feel as if the loving bond that she had created with her son had been disrupted. She admitted to feeling terrible shame and self-loathing because of these thoughts.

I reassured her that these sentiments are normal and expectable for families raising twins. Studies show that the specific circumstances of twins’ birth often perpetuate lasting impressions in respect to parental perspectives and feelings. For example, some parents feel more positive feelings for the child who comes home from the hospital first, the child who weighs more, the child who sleeps more, or the child who is more sociable – the list goes on and on. The important thing to remember is that these initial feelings or

perceptions do not have to remain intractable or interminable. They can be articulated, reframed, and reworked.

Case in point: My acquaintance called to tell me about a transformative moment that she experienced with her daughter a few weeks ago. She described it as follows: The other morning I told my daughter that I had been saving these very special hair ornaments for her. Now that her hair had grown so long, it was the perfect time to see how they looked. I carried my daughter to my bathroom. We both stared at our reflection together in the mirror. We experienced a "falling in love" moment – I told her how beautiful she looked and how much I loved her. She felt my authenticity, love, and affirmation. Our relationship has been different since that moment. We are "going out for coffee" by ourselves, and I am making a special effort to make up for lost time by forgiving myself, enjoying what I have recaptured, and creating more alone time with her.

Comparisons with twins are unavoidable and inevitable. Nonetheless, being able to love each child by creating a strong connection to each one is key to successful parenting. Taking the time to be alone with each child will help your twins forge healthy emotional relationships with each other and the outside world.▪