



## Parenthood and Twins

I want to deviate temporarily from my psychoanalytic reports about twin development to discuss the crucial marital issues that confront many new parents of twins. There seems to be a predictable percentage of new moms of twins that feel utterly devastated by dashed hopes and expectations related to their husbands. Their grief and despair is profound and at times unfathomable. Although it is well documented that emotional adjustments must be made when the marital dyad becomes a triad after the birth of an infant, many couples coping with two babies or more do not easily make this transition. The fact of the matter is that in the case of multiple births, the mother is simply not able to take care of two babies or more by herself. The mental and physical fatigue is inexplicable to anyone who has not travelled down that road. The wife's grief and anger about unrealized expectations of help and support from her partner simply feels unforgivable, and at times, bordering on outright cruelty. As the crisis situation abates and the circumstances feel more manageable, tensions do lessen. However, in the case of many twin moms, the normalizing process is slow and prolonged, often fraught with a tremendous sense of panic, outrage, and guilt. Their maternal feelings are conflicted, confused, and worrisome because many women translate these feeling states to mean that they do not love their children. Since so many remarkably competent women felt so miserably overwhelmed and victimized in those first few months of their babies lives, their feelings of malice and anger stay potent for longer periods of time and leave a residue of animosity that is easily accessed and triggered.

I want to quote a passage about marriage and parenting from a book called *Couples in Collusion* by Jurg Willi, a German psychoanalyst. Jurg writes:

Marriage has many psychological parallels with early parent-child relationships and is greatly influenced by them. During the first months and years of its life, a child is introduced to the basic elements of intimate human relationships. No other interpersonal relationship comes as close to parent-child intimacy as marriage. No other relationship offers such complete satisfaction of the elementary need for oneness, for belonging to another, for caring and being looked after and for protection, safety, and dependence. The behavior of two people in love is also very similar to that of mother and child; they hold each other in their arms, caress each other, encourage physical contact, look deeply into each other's eyes, smile, and squeeze and hug each other, joke and kiss. Their language very often reverts to preverbal sounds and other modes of expression of early childhood... Hardly any other interpersonal relationship requires such a high level of identity, stability, autonomy and maturity as that of the intimate, complete and committed couple. Each partner expects deep, human understanding from the other and achievement of real personal fulfillment. To find solutions to the multitude of problems facing them requires ability and insight, and in the event of personal difficulties and stresses the partner will be the first to be approached for help and advice... Marriage demands the courage to embrace real growth and change and to put at risk one's freedom... Marital

crises are not in themselves symptoms of pathology. The pathological phenomena of marriage arise from the avoidance of the normal and inevitable crises of growth. Withdrawal from real conflict is an impetus to collusion. When a couple has children, their relationship undergoes a major transformation. They no longer have as much time alone together, they can no longer direct their attention uniquely towards each other and the period of exclusive intimacy comes to an end. Typically it is the husband who is jealous of the attention which the children receive, but wives too may feel cheated of the tenderness, attention, and security they expect from their partner. Where there is a fear of intimacy, the children may provide a welcome channel for deeper contact, although serious problems later arise when they leave the family. ▪

