

## **The importance of fostering siblings together**

Having been separated from their birth parents, my first insight into how separating siblings could impact on children when coming into care was nine years ago, when a sibling group of three came to live with us. The children had experienced neglect and harmful parenting and I was amazed by their ability to settle by playing and reassuring each other, perhaps a touch on the arm or a nervous smile.

Whilst caring for the children has not been without its challenges; including issues around 'adult behaviour' exhibited from one sibling to another with one child acting like a 'parent' and not understanding how to act like a child themselves and observing how challenging behaviour being displayed by one child can be mimicked by another sibling, generally I found that the children adapted very quickly to a new way of living, learning and growing in a warm safe and secure family and together they became more confident and accepting.

I have watched them develop and support each other through difficult times. It is these times when, for example, contact doesn't go as the children have wanted, I have overheard conversations about their thoughts and feelings and even though I am there for them, I truly appreciate the bond that exists between them and how strong this is. I understand that the children's first peers are likely to be their siblings and in the future, their relationships with one another are likely to last a lifetime.

In my experience, children being placed together as a sibling group offers a sense of instant belonging; many times I have heard them say, "That's my sister" or "That's my brother". Whilst I feel a great sense of sadness that the children may not have had the best start in life, I feel an overwhelming sense of how they can feel less estranged from their birth family by being placed with and close to their siblings to allow them continuity and security.

Rachel Cutts  
North foster carer