Annotated Bibliography on Siblings in Out-of-Home Care
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Child Welfare Practice


Makes the case that a family focus in child welfare decision-making must include attention to siblings, and outlines steps agencies must take to improve policy and practice to promote better outcomes for sibling groups.


A monograph that looks at the importance of keeping siblings together in both long and short-term care. The paper also explores ways of maintaining contact if separation has occurred. Australia. Order from: http://www.barnardos.org.au/barnardos/html/monographs.cfm


Written in compliance with state legislation requiring that CDSS conduct a study to determine the barriers which limit the placement resources available for sibling groups and develop solutions to those barriers.


Practice tips from various sources.


Although keeping siblings together is a preferred service plan, separation may be necessary in some circumstances, which are outlined in this document. When siblings cannot be placed together, a visiting and maintenance plan is required. Describes best practices in visiting and lists several unresolved issues.


Information contained in this packet includes summaries of issues, legislation, statistics, research evidence, model programs, and recommended websites and literature pertaining to siblings in out-of-home care.

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1 This bibliography was originally prepared by the Casey Family Programs National Center for Resource Family Support in 2002. It has been updated by the National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning.

An adoption worker rebuts some arguments for separating siblings and looks at ways to prepare families and support them after the adoption of sibling groups.


This article describes work being done by Oklahoma Department of Human Services to improve its child welfare practice with siblings using data collected through its Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System.


In this section on sibling relationships, the author presents both advantages and disadvantages to placing sibling together. She also discusses some factors to be considered in assessing families for the adoption of sibling groups.


Practical casework considerations in placing sibling groups of three or more.


Points out that the placement of siblings in kinship care is often complicated: "Seventy-four of the 77 children in the sample had siblings. Siblings of the children in kinship foster care lived in a variety of settings, adding to the diversity and complexity of family caregiving and child-rearing arrangements. Seventy-eight percent of the children had one or more siblings living in the same relative's home with them. Forty percent of the children had siblings living with at least one other relative. Nine percent had siblings living in traditional family foster care placements with nonrelatives."


This is the first in a series of reports analyzing the completed Federal Child and Family Service Reviews. One issue examined (pp. 24-29) is sibling placement and visitation.


This article is based on research and practice experience from projects and cases in both public child welfare agencies and private adoption agencies. The authors summarize the research on sibling relationships, including a description of sibling relationships in families where children have been abused and neglected; discuss the barriers in child welfare that can result in the separation of siblings; and offer best practice solutions that support maintaining sibling relationships throughout temporary and permanent placement. An assessment tool to assist in the decision-making process for the placement of siblings is also included. This tool will help practitioners think systematically about the placement of siblings in order to make the best decisions.

Because of the significant relationships that children may have with their parents and siblings before being removed from their home, children who enter the child welfare system may experience anxiety, trauma, grief, guilt and loss of identity. The purpose of this paper is to explore the ameliorating effect that sibling connections can have on these factors. It is the authors’ position that sibling connections are extremely important to children in out-of-home care and, apart from situations where sibling contact will cause trauma or disruption for the children, professionals should make every effort to maintain sibling relationships. Both of the authors are child welfare researchers who also spent a significant amount of time in foster care, together and separated from siblings.


The author makes a case for finding adoptive placements that allow siblings to stay together, providing post-adoption supports for families that adopt siblings, and, when siblings are separated, helping them resolve issues of loss, grief, guilty, and jealousy.


Brief review of reasons commonly given for separating siblings, and factors that should be considered.


In an interview format, an adoption worker and a foster care worker describe the cooperative process by which they placed seven siblings together in one adoptive home.


The authors recommend that siblings might be placed together even in those cases usually cited as reasons for separation, such as (1) sibling abuse, positing that abusive or aggressive behaviors will continue in separate placements, with different victims; and (2) the parentified child, whose emotional state may be harmed by the loss of younger siblings. Also discussed are cases in which the adoption of one member of a sibling pair is disrupted, and the effects of the adoption of children with special needs on biological children in the family.


The author makes the case for leaving young children in fost-adopt homes in which they have bonded with their parents rather than moving them in order to reunite them with siblings with whom they have little or no connection.


A practice brief that provides practice tips for working with siblings in adoption.


The overall training objectives of this two-day curriculum are: to enhance understanding of issues concerning siblings in out-of-home care; to expand knowledge and skills in making appropriate
placement decisions for sibling groups; to enhance knowledge and skills in the recruitment and retention of resource families willing and able to parent sibling groups; to enhance ability to present appropriate information to the court to support sibling groups; and to increase knowledge of policy and legislation affecting sibling placements in participants' jurisdictions.


An article from the Alaska Adoption Exchange provides suggestions for sibling placements.


Summary of 1993 Minnesota guidelines to be followed by agencies seeking to place siblings in separate adoptive placements.


Information contained in this packet includes fact sheets, practice tips, model programs, a review of policies and legislation, references and suggested readings, and web resources pertaining to siblings in foster care.


This article looks at open adoption, often considered in infant adoption, as a way to recognize all of a child’s relationships, including those with siblings. Because children with special needs are often adopted after abuse or neglect in their birth families, openness can be more challenging to the birth family, the adoptive parents, and to the child. The author presents a philosophy and model that "requires, creates, and supports reciprocal and participatory pathways for education, values clarification, negotiation, mediation, and problem resolution."


This study focused on pairs of siblings placed by a private long-term foster care agency, looking at the relationship between placement disruption and placement with and without the paired sibling. The researchers found that sibling pairs placed together were more likely to remain in their first placement than those placed separately, but that of disrupted placements, it was more likely for both members of a placed-together pair to experience disruption. However, some pairs also had other siblings whose placements were not considered in the study.


The authors, writing at a time in which it was a rare practice to maintain sibling groups in placement, focus on ways in which sibling groups can help their members deal with issues of separation and loss from one another as well as from the family of origin.


The author discusses the importance of sibling ties to children and offers recommendations for maintaining ties through the placement process. She stresses the need to consider the wishes and needs of the children in making placement decisions.

This paper draws from the attachment theory literature, social work literature, and the author's experience as an outpatient psychotherapist. Using the concept of a secure attachment environment, this paper argues that siblings can potentially contribute to, or detract from a secure attachment environment.


Maine Youth Law Advisory Team members met with the Bureau of Child and Family Services Director in 2001. In this meeting, they expressed concern about siblings becoming separated far too frequently in the foster care system. As a result of that meeting, YLAT members compiled feedback that became their position paper on siblings. It was submitted to DHS and was used to produce official policy that became effective July 25, 2002.

General


This brief newspaper article presents the experiences and opinions of several individuals involved in sibling issues.


Newspaper article describes Chicago’s Jane Addams Hull House sibling placement program and reviews various state efforts to improve placement issues for siblings during the 1990s.


Electronic magazine article on the separation of siblings in out-of-home care.


The author is a college student who was placed in foster care with some but not all of her siblings and later adopted along with two brothers into a family of 36. She writes of her experience and her desire to improve the system from within.


This news story describes a 67-year old woman who is searching for nine siblings. All the children were relinquished by their birth parents; she lost touch with all of them in 1946. She has found two brothers.


This news article describes the efforts of some children conceived from anonymous sperm bank donations to connect with and build relationships with biological half-siblings.


Contains an overview of what is known about sibling issues in out-of-home care, including a look at the intensity of the sibling bond, reasons frequently given for separating siblings, research findings that indicate these reasons may be faulty, and guidelines for decision-making in sibling placement.

This guidebook is addressed to both adoption workers and adoptive families of sibling groups. It focuses on practical matters including using life books, having siblings in separate placements see the same mental health professional, therapeutic game-playing, recruiting families for sibling groups, pre-adoption visits, post-adoption supports, and attending to the needs of biological children in the family.


Electronic article describing sibling placement programs in Chicago and Florida.


Brief summary of research on sibling bonds.


Brief description of several programs addressing issues involving siblings in out-of-home care.


This article discusses the importance of sibling relationships across the lifespan.


The first person true story of a woman who was separated from her sister as a baby, was reconnected at age eight, and formed a relationship as an adult. She founded Camp To Belong, a camping experience devoted to bringing separated siblings together.


Describes some approaches to keeping siblings together in foster and adoptive placements as well as ways to maintain sibling connections even when they are placed separately.


In this brief article, the author provides some practical suggestions for adoptive parents of separated siblings, advising them to be open about their concerns, willing to maintain contact, committed to honoring children’s wishes, honest about other siblings, and accepting of their children’s feelings about their siblings.

Law

♦ Dillard, R.S. (1999). Child in foster care seeks Supreme Court determination that siblings have a right to family integrity when their parents have lost custody. The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute. [Online]. Retrieved from the Internet at http://www.adoptioninstitute.org/policy/polsib.html

Summary of a case brought before Massachusetts Supreme Court in 1999.


The author looks at decision-making in sibling placements from the perspective of the attorney.
Youth of the DCFS Statewide Youth Advisory Board (SYAB) wrote a resolution and presented it at a senate hearing. The resolution, written with the assistance of law students from Loyola University School of Law, creates a 20-member Task Force that will include legislators, current and former foster children and representatives from the Department’s advisory groups on foster care, adoption and youth services.

This article discusses the status of sibling rights and then addresses whether these rights deserve constitutional protection.

A discussion of state laws related to formalized open adoption agreements, with citations and links. Four states (California, Indiana, Maryland and Massachusetts) have separate provisions for sibling visitation.

Describes litigation concerning foster care. Of particular interest in sibling issues are cases filed in Illinois (1988, Office of the Cook County Public Guardian), and New York (1990, Legal Aid Society).

A review of case law and legislation involving sibling rights since 1991. Looks in particular at the legal status of siblings regarding visitation rights both pre- and post-termination of parental rights and in pre- and post-adoption scenarios in which sibling rights are measured against those of biological, foster, and adoptive parents. Concludes with a call to create a National Siblings Day.

The Nevada Supreme Court ruled that the state must provide a teenager in foster care with information about the adoptive placements of her biological siblings. Specifically, the Court last month ordered the state to provide the addresses of the two adoptive families so that the teenager can serve the adoptive parents with petitions for sibling visitation. The Court found that the state agency defied a previous family court order to develop a sibling visitation plan with prospective adoptive parents before the children were permanently placed. Moreover, the Court rejected the state’s argument that releasing the adoption records would make families less likely to adopt.

Literature Reviews
This review of the psychological and developmental literature focuses on child characteristics and family processes and proposes a model that mediates the links between the two. Of note is the
observation that the combination of high level of support between siblings is rarely combined with a low level of rivalry.


A multidisciplinary literature review of research on sibling relationships and sibling separation, concluding that the importance of sibling ties should be respected in foster care placements.


This review includes studies on sibling separation patterns and factors, differences between children placed with siblings and children placed alone, foster mothers' and caseworkers' views on sibling placement, and the relationship between sibling separation and child functioning.


This review addresses the following questions: What is the significance of the adult sibling relationship? What are the patterns and types of the adult sibling relationship? What are the factors that affect the adult sibling relationship?


This literature review focuses on factors that affect the nature of sibling relationships, including attachment to mother, the quality of the parental relationship, family emotional climate and stress, parental neglect and unavailability, abuse, parental favoritism, non-shared environmental influences, and access. The author concludes that an assessment of the quality of the sibling relationship should be an essential part of the decision-making process in placement.

Psychology


The authors present their view of the nature of the sibling bond based on their experience treating siblings in a psychotherapeutic setting.


Classical attachment theory views mother as the first and most important figure in an infant’s life. A larger view of attachment moves toward a model of simultaneous and multiple attachment figures. In particular, it is argued that peer attachment is a separate but related system. A review of children’s peer relationships, including siblings, leads to the consideration of a social network model in which a variety of different people satisfy a variety of different needs of the child.

Research


An examination of older child adoption in northern California from 1980 to 1984 showed a decreased disruption rate, largely attributable to the greater use of foster parent adoptions. Contrary to expectations, placements in which siblings were together were not exceptionally likely to disrupt.
Examination of Illinois child welfare data shows that sibling groups of varying sizes are more likely to be placed together when they are living with relatives than when they are in unrelated foster care. For the most recent data (FY 2004), the proportion placed together has remained level or declined for kinship care, but has improved significantly in unrelated foster care for sibling groups of all sizes.


This research focuses on how siblings are organized following two types of family transitions: foster care placements and parental divorce. Its goal was to identify the family characteristics associated with intact and split sibling groups. Results indicated that siblings are more likely to be separated when children are older and when they have a larger age gap with their siblings; arrangements in which siblings are separated produce greater instability for them.


Describes children who were the subjects of a comprehensive study on kinship care. Sibling issues are only noted with a brief statistical reference that "Of those with siblings, the majority (68%) had at least one sibling placed together with them."


This article reviews 17 studies from several countries which address definitions and descriptions of sibling groups in care, characteristics of children placed together or separately, and outcomes of sibling placements. Most studies examining outcomes suggest that joint sibling placements are as stable as, or more stable than, placements of single children or separated siblings and that children do as well or better when placed with siblings. Implications for policy, practice, and research are discussed.


This Scottish study reveals that issues impacting siblings in care in the United Kingdom are the same as those in the United States. Of 337 children in the study, 82% were known to have siblings. Sixty percent of these were not living with any of their brothers and sisters. Separated siblings lived in a variety of situations both within and outside the child welfare system, and reunification plans were often not in place.


Although practice guidelines support the placement of siblings in the same foster home whenever possible, sibling groups are frequently separated. Little empirical knowledge is available to understand why siblings are separated or how different sibling placement patterns are related to children’s placement adaptation and permanency outcomes. These questions were investigated using data from a study involving telephone interviews with the caseworkers and foster parents of a cross-sectional sample of 197 randomly selected young adolescents in long-term, traditional family foster care. Placement outcomes, including placement disruption, reunification, and adoption, were followed prospectively for five years. Results of multivariate analyses indicate that adolescents who were placed alone after a history of joint sibling placements were at greater
risk for placement disruption than those who were placed with a consistent number of siblings while in foster care. This association was mediated by a weaker sense of integration and belonging in the foster home among youth placed alone with a history of sibling placements. Youth placed alone, either throughout their stay in foster care or after a history of sibling placements, were less likely to exit to adoption or subsidized guardianship than youth with consistent joint sibling placements.


California law requires that child welfare agencies place siblings together in foster care whenever possible. Such decisions depend on how siblings are identified. Siblings are usually identified when children are removed from the same household, while non-coreident siblings can be missed and may not be considered in placement decisions or analyses. This exploratory study examines a cross-section of children in the California foster care system, comparing four different sibling classification schemes to determine how well each method identifies siblings and discusses how each strategy might apply to meeting legislative mandates for placing siblings together.


A synthesis of literature on the possible relationship between those siblings being raised together in the 'mixed' adoptive home. Based on a broad review of research literature from the fields of adoption, developmental psychology, and behavioral genetics, it discusses adoptive family functioning and the sibling relationships, when raising both adoptive and birth children together.


The author surveyed a small number of caseworkers and foster mothers, seeking information about their beliefs and attitudes about siblings in out-of-home placements. Differences in the beliefs of the two groups may contribute to inadequate training and preparation of foster families for sibling group placements.


The goal of this exploratory research was to acquire a deep understanding of the experience of sibling bereavement in young adulthood. In-depth interviews with 7 young women who had suffered the loss of a sibling between the ages of 18-30 were conducted in an effort to describe this type of loss during this stage in life. Participants shared the effects of the loss, related helpful and unhelpful methods of coping, and discussed external factors that either facilitated or hindered effective coping. Based on these findings, a theory of sibling bereavement in young adulthood was developed.


The paper describes sibling-related investigations conducted within the first stage of a prospective study of the mental health of 347 children (aged 4-11) in foster and kinship care in New South Wales, Australia (the Children in Care Study). Mental health was measured with the Child Behavior Checklist and with a carer-report instrument designed to measure psychopathology specifically observed among children in care (the Assessment Checklist for Children). A large
number of study factors were measured, including several confounders of sibling-related data. The analyses include: the distribution and stability of sibling placements; mental health and socialization estimates stratified by sibling placement status; and a within-pairs comparison of oldest-younger sibling dyads in shared placements. Girls separated from all of their siblings were reported to have significantly poorer mental health and socialization than girls residing with at least one sibling.


Program evaluation of a community-based "professional" foster care program in which one of the goals is to keep sibling groups of three or more together and near their home community.


This study was undertaken to incorporate sibling information and account for sibling bias when modeling longitudinal child welfare outcomes using a generalized linear model such as logistic regression. Results indicate that some sibling-specific factors (e.g., being placed together in care) strongly predict reunification, while another (i.e., number of siblings) does not. Implications for child welfare policy, practice, and future research are discussed.


Although research that focuses on sibling placements in foster care has increased in recent years, for the most part this research has focused on single samples from a point-in-time perspective. This paper approaches the matter of sibling placements with longitudinal data, differentiating between the notions of togetherness and intactness in order to describe the placement experiences of sibling groups. The authors found that, although siblings often enter care on the same day, they make up less than half the groups entering care; and that small sibling groups and those placed with relatives are more likely to be placed intact. Moreover, there is evidence that separated siblings who remain in care are sometimes brought together over time, sibling group size and placement type affect the likelihood that siblings are brought together, and children who follow their siblings into care are much less likely to be placed with a sibling compared to siblings that enter foster care on the same day.

Statistics


Under an Interagency Agreement with the California Department of Social Services, CWRC receives quarterly extracts from the Child Welfare Services Case Management System (CWS/CMS). With CDSS funding and additional support from the Stuart Foundation, the Performance Indicators Project creates and presents timely and useful data about children who are involved in California's Child Welfare System. This data includes statistics about the placement of siblings in every county as well as statewide.


Describes a project that involves privatizing child welfare services in Kansas. Limited statistics given in the context of outcomes over a four-year period.
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Pages 16-19 of the Analysis section of this report details the characteristics and placement of sibling groups in fiscal year 1999.


New York City is required to track sibling cases as a result of a lawsuit brought by the Legal Aid Society in 1990. Report provides information about sibling groups placed in care 1985-1999. Among the findings mentioned in this report: Siblings who enter care on the same day have the best chance of being placed together; smaller groups are more likely to enter on the same day than larger groups; when siblings are not placed on the same day, less than one-third of the later placements are in the same facility as the first child(ren); placement together is more likely in kinship care than in non-related foster homes or congregate care facilities; of groups initially placed together, those in kinship homes were more likely to remain intact after six months than those in foster care or congregate care.


A summary of statistics concerning children being planned for separately from their brothers and sisters in New York State from January 1998 to July 1999.


Included in this progress report for 2000-2001 and goals for 2001-2005 are some statistics concerning sibling placements in foster care.


This brief examines data from an evaluation of the Neighbor to Neighbor foster care program in Chicago, Illinois, showing that even when extended kin are unavailable, it is possible to attain similar levels of siblings placed together if unrelated foster parents are recruited, trained, and hired as professionals for the task.

Advocacy


This 121-page report summarizes the program content and supporting materials for the National Leadership Symposium on Siblings in Out-of-Home Care held on May 19 and 20, 2002, and co-sponsored by Casey Family Programs and the Florida-based Neighbor to Family Program. More than 30 individuals from diverse fields, including foster care alumni, child welfare practitioners and policymakers, legal experts, resource families, and researchers explored ways to focus attention on issues affecting brothers and sisters in foster, kinship, and adoptive placements.

A statement from Casey Family Programs National Center for Resource Family Support on their beliefs about good practice in working with siblings in the child welfare system.


Analyzes Colorado legislation aimed at maintaining sibling ties in placement; suggests six possible strategies for advocates to follow in working toward meaningful implementation of the bill.


The preservation and maintenance of sibling relationships in child welfare settings have begun to come to the forefront of practice and policy considerations. While past research on families coming into contact with the child protective services system has largely focused on the parent-child relationship, an emerging body of literature indicates that the relationship between brothers and sisters cannot be ignored. This paper highlights recent and historical trends in the literature on siblings in foster care, reviews some of the legal issues surrounding conjoint sibling placement, proposes a constitutionally protected right of association among siblings in out-of-home care, and explores the multiple and complex methodological challenges facing researchers in this area.