

## Why Keeping Sibling Connections is Important

Professional literature repeatedly affirms the importance of the sibling bond. It is the longest lasting relationship most people ever have. Brothers and sisters share common experiences and history. Siblings raised in emotionally stressed families may have an even stronger bond. When parents are absent, physically or emotionally, older siblings often take their place in significant ways. Studies have shown that foster children have an easier time transitioning and adjusting to adoption when they have the emotional support of their siblings.

Various papers assert that the placement of siblings together should be a priority in case planning and implementation. Valid reasons must be provided for failure to place siblings together.

Placement of siblings together serves many purposes. The primary purposes are:

- To preserve the sibling relationship and bond
- To provide healing from the impact of separation from family and a familiar environment
- To provide support through developmental changes and growth
- To establish a healthy bond between siblings who may or may not have had any significant prior relationship or bond with one another
- To strengthen youth's self esteem through acceptance, unconditional love and a sense of belonging and identity.
- To strengthen youth's relationship skills through support, resolving conflicts with one another and communication.

## Family Connections are a Right

Article 8 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states: Parties undertake to respect the right of the child to preserve his or her identity, including nationality, name and family relations as recognized by law without unlawful interference.

## Considerations for Placement Decisions

The placement plan should be to place siblings together, unless there is a danger of specific harm to a youth or it is not in a child or youth's best interest to be placed together. Siblings who are not initially placed together should be reunited in the same foster care setting, unless exceptional reasons exist that preclude reunification as soon as possible.

Siblings who are placed in different residential settings should:

- be placed in the same town/community or geographic region,
- be placed in settings where the caregiver will promote and facilitate frequent, meaningful contact.

Where appropriate, an older sibling ought to be considered as a care provider for younger siblings, provided that the older sibling could adequately care for younger siblings given the same support that is provided to foster or adoptive parents. It is important to ensure that there is no danger of specific harm to a youth and that it is not contrary to a youth's best interest.

Visitation between siblings should be made a priority and supported by a documented case plan. Valid reasons must be provided for failure to implement a visitation plan. If distance makes regular visits impossible, siblings should be supported to maintain frequent contact through letters, email, cards and phone calls.

When a youth moves, siblings should be:

- informed that a move has occurred
- given the new location
- informed, when appropriate, of reasons for relocation.

Article 9 of the UNCRC states:

Where separation results from any action initiated by the State Party, that State Party shall, upon request, provide the child with the essential information concerning the whereabouts of the absent member(s) of the family unless the provision of the information would be detrimental to the well-being of the child.

The information found in this document as well as many other good ideas for keeping siblings in foster care or adoptive homes connected can be found in the sources below:

Child Welfare Information Gateway, Siblings Groups in Out-of-Home Care:

<http://www.childwelfare.gov/outofhome/casework/children/siblings.cfm>

Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2006). Sibling Issues in Foster Care and Adoption: A Bulletin for Professionals. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

<http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/siblingissues/>

Child Welfare Information Gateway, Adopting Siblings Groups

<http://www.childwelfare.gov/permanency/adoption/children/siblings.cfm>

Gloria Hochman, Ellen Feathers-Acuna, and Anna Huston (1992). The Sibling Bond: Its Importance in Foster Care and Adoptive Placement. National Adoption Information Clearinghouse.

<http://library.adoption.com/articles/the-sibling-bond-its-importance-in-foster-care-and-adoptive-placement.html>

This is a companion document to the report **Belonging 4 Ever: Creating Permanency for Youth in and from Care (2010)**, available from the **Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks** and **First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition**.