"Sibling Relationships are Sacred": Benefits of Sibling Placement and Contact

Social science support for your in-court and out-of-court legal advocacy

A tool for lawyers

Information is up to date as of May 2023. To share information to be added to this tool or to provide feedback, please e-mail cathy.krebs@americanbar.org

Benefits of Sibling Connections

I.   EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

"Sibling relationships are sacred and must be prioritized in placement and other court decisions." (National Association of Counsel for Children. (2023). *NACC Draft Policy Framework.*) Research shows that the failure to maintain sibling relationships in foster care harms children's ability to form their identities, deprives them of a vital source of support as they grow and develop, and causes lifelong grief and yearning. Further, direct accounts from youth with lived experience in foster care describe how critical sibling relationships are and the trauma of sibling separation. Roughly two-thirds of children in foster care in the United States have at least one sibling, many of them are separated – often forever – and courts rarely consider the damage such separation causes. Counsel for parents and children should advocate for the placement of siblings together and, when siblings cannot be placed together, for frequent visitation in order to maintain the sibling relationship. The sibling bond is often the most enduring relationship in a person's life. Maintenance of sibling bonds increases the likelihood of both adoption and reunification, helps improve each child's mental health, reinforces feelings of stability, shapes identity, and ameliorates educational and adult life competence. Research and lived experience show that continuation of sibling relationships is imperative for children in the child welfare system.

II.   HOW TO USE THIS TOOL

How you can use this tool in trial or appellate advocacy will largely depend on your jurisdiction. For example, you may be able to include the clinical summaries below (or your own synthesis/analysis of them) in your:

- Motion for joint sibling placement
- Motion for sibling visitation
- Permanency plan, or opposition to the agency's permanency plan
- Adoption plan, or opposition to an adoption plan
- Administrative appeal regarding agency decisions regarding siblings
- Other motion, petition, or memorandum
- Appellate brief to educate your appellate court on the importance of sibling relationships

There are also other ways, outside of court, you can use this toolkit to affect the outcome of your case or even to effectuate long-term change. For example, you may be able to provide this tool to:

- Your expert
- Your child client's therapist/mental health provider
- Your child client's residential/group home case manager
- A guardian ad litem, CASA, probation officer, or other "neutral" investigator in order to educate (and persuade) them
- The agency social worker or other staff in order to educate (and persuade) them

- Any workgroup or committee in your jurisdiction, including those that include judicial officers, to further educate them on this issue
- Legislators who are considering bills regarding sibling placement or visitation

Further, if you have provided this information to your own expert, you may, depending on the jurisdiction, be able to examine the expert on it. If you have provided it to one or more of the other persons listed above, your jurisdiction may permit you to examine or cross-examine them as to whether they read it and whether they pursued placements where siblings could be together or at least have frequent visits and other forms of contact.

In any event, regardless of jurisdiction, counsel should be able to *speak* to judges and social workers about the benefits of the sibling connection. Decisions in child welfare cases should be guided by social science research.

Please note that, where available, we are including URLs to cited articles. Some URLs link to complete articles; others link to abstracts where the complete article can be ordered from the author or from a proprietary database. If you are having difficulty locating an article, please e-mail cathy.krebs@americanbar.org for assistance.

III.   TALKING POINTS FOR TRIAL COUNSEL

Below are key takeaways and talking points from social science research that may help lawyers persuade judges (and the foster care agency) to place children with their siblings. Note that all sources cited in these talking points are discussed, with full citations, in Section V.

A. Children's best interests are served by placing them with siblings after removal from their parents.

- Separating siblings heightens trauma and damages children's mental health. (Trivedi 2019; McCormick 2010; Smith 2009; Timberlake & Hamlin 1982).

- Separating siblings leads to identity-formation problems and a lost sense of stability and belonging. (Angel 2014; Kramer et al. 2019; Smith 2009).

- Placing siblings together reduces trauma caused by removal from parents. (Edwards 2011; McCormick 2010; Laurel et al. 2008).

- Placing siblings together increases the chances of reunification with parents. (Albert & King 2008; Waid 2015; Laurel et al. 2008).

- Placing siblings together increases the chances that children will be adopted. (McCormick 2010; Smith 2009).

- Placing siblings together decreases the likelihood of placement disruptions. (Akin 2011; Sattler et al. 2018; Rolock & White 2016; Font 2021).

- Siblings in foster care may also look to each other as a unique source of support and help. (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2019; McCormick 2010).

- Placing siblings together reduces depression, self-blame, and anxiety. (Hegar 2009; Richardson & Yates 2014; Davidson-Arad & Klein 2011; Wojciak et al. 2018).

- Keeping siblings together improves each child's educational competence and reduces behavioral issues in the classroom. (Richardson & Yates 2014; Kothari et al. 2018; Hegar and Rosenthal 2011).

- Keeping siblings together improves adulthood social skills. (Bank et al. 2014; Richardson & Yates 2014).

B. **If siblings cannot be placed together, children's best interests are served by frequent visitation.**

- Maintaining sibling relationships requires regular contact when they are not placed together. (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2019; Mass. Sibling Bill of Rights 2012).

- Children desire more contact with siblings after separation. (Helfrich et al. 2013; Smith & Howard 1999; Patton & Latz 1994; Mandelbaum 2011).

- Frequent sibling visitation leads to better mental health, social competence, and sense of stability and belonging. (Family Futures 2019; National Center for Child Welfare Excellence; McBride 2007; Richardson & Yates 2014; Herrick & Piccus 2005).

- Frequent sibling contact leads to better financial circumstances later in life. (Richardson & Yates 2014; Helfrich et al. 2013).

C. **Federal statutes require efforts to place siblings together and maintain sibling connections.**

- The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, Public Law 110-351, mandates that states make "reasonable efforts" to maintain sibling connections in order to receive federal funding and either place siblings in the same home or provide for frequent visitation or ongoing contact, unless either of these would be contrary to the safety or well-being of any of the siblings.

- The Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014, Public Law 113-183, requires that the parents of a child's siblings be included as persons to be notified when that child needs placement.

- The Family First Prevention Services Act of 2018, Public Law 115-123, permits states to allow the number of foster children in one home to exceed the usual numerical limitation in order to allow siblings to remain together.

D. Many states have statutes requiring or encouraging placement of siblings together.

Thirty-seven states, the District of Columbia, and Guam have statutes requiring agencies to make reasonable efforts to place siblings in the same home, absent documented reasons as to why joint placement would not be in their best interests. Thirty-five states and Puerto Rico also have statutes requiring that siblings not placed together be given opportunities for visits and/or communication. State-specific legislation can be found at: https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/laws-policies/statutes/placement/.

Finally, many states' Foster Care Bills of Rights protect the interests of siblings for co-placement and/or regular contact. Some examples are:

Arizona	Ariz. Rev. Stat. § 8-529(3) (2009)	Foster children have a right to know where their siblings are placed.
Connecticut	Conn. Stat. Ann. 17a-10a	Siblings placed in different foster homes have a right to visitation with one another.
Delaware	Del. Code. tit. 13 § 2522(a)(6)	Foster children have a right to contact and visit their siblings also in foster care, or to be notified as to the reason why such visitation is inappropriate.
Florida	Fla. Stat. § 39.4085(1)(o)	Foster children have the right to visitation with their siblings at least once a week.
Hawaii	Haw. Rev. Stat. § 587A-3.1(5)	Foster children have the right to visitation with their siblings.
Minnesota	Minn. Laws, § 260C.008	Foster children have the right: • to be placed in the same home as their siblings when possible; • to be placed geographically close to one another if not; • to have frequent contact with siblings; • to have regular in-person visitation with siblings; • to have adult siblings considered as custodians.
New Jersey	Bill Text: NJ S1034 | 2022-2023 | Regular Session | Chaptered | LegiScan	Foster children have the right to the best efforts of the applicable department to place the child in the same setting with the child's sibling if the sibling is also being placed outside his home; and to visit with the child's sibling on a regular basis and to otherwise maintain contact with the child's sibling if the child was separated from his sibling upon placement outside his home, including the provision or arrangement of

		transportation as necessary, and to have access to a phone number or computer that allows for virtual visits between face-to-face visits or when face-to-face visits are not feasible.
North Carolina	N.C. Gen. Stat. § 131D-10.1(a)(2), (a)(10)	Foster children have the right to first-priority placement in a home with their siblings and to have regular communication with their siblings in different homes.
Pennsylvania	Pa. Stat. tit. 11, § 2633(10)	Foster children have the right to visit and contact siblings "as frequently as possible" and to have adult siblings given first consideration as custodians.
Texas	Tex. Family Code Ann. § 263.008	Foster children have the right to placement with siblings.

IV.   LIVED EXPERIENCE PERSPECTIVES ON SIBLING SEPARATION IN FOSTER CARE

Brothers and Sisters: Keeping Siblings in Foster Care Connected by EPIC 'Ohana, Inc.
Brothers and Sisters: Keeping Siblings in Foster Care Connected - YouTube

This 9-minute YouTube video focuses on youth who have spent time in foster care discussing their relationship with their siblings and the impact of being able to live with them or being separated from them.

Brought up in Care and Separated from my Siblings Brought Up In Care And Separated From My Siblings - YouTube
BBC The Social

This 4-minute YouTube video focuses on a young man who grew up in state custody and the impact of his being separated from his siblings.

Sibling Placement and Contact in Out-of-Home Care Sibling Placement and Contact in Out-of-Home Care - YouTube
CREATE

Children and young people in out-of-home care across Australia have told CREATE that living with their brothers and sisters in care is very important and that they are the people they most want to contact when they are not living together. (8-minute YouTube video)

Sibling Connections, by Laticia Aossey Sibling Connections - The Imprint (imprintnews.org)

This short news article by a woman who spent time in foster care describes how her greatest difficulty in the foster care system was being separated from her siblings.

Woman Separated from Brother in Foster Care Wants to Keep Siblings Together Woman Separated From Brother In Foster Care Wants To Keep Siblings Together - YouTube
CBS Colorado

This 3-minute news story highlights the efforts of a woman who was permanently separated from her brother when they were placed into foster care who is now fighting for a sibling bill of rights in Colorado so that other young people do not have to endure the pain that she did.

ReMoved, by Nathaniel Matanick, ReMoved - YouTube

This 13-minute video focuses on the removal of a young girl from her home and placement into foster care, but it also includes the importance of her relationship with her little brother.

V.   SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

   1. **Children's best interests are served by placing them with siblings after removal from their parents.**

      a) **Separating siblings heightens trauma and damages children's mental health.**

- Shanta Trivedi, *The Harm of Child Removal*, 43 N.Y.U. Rev. L. & Soc. Change 523 (2019), https://scholarworks.law.ubalt.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2087&context=all_fac

   This article examines the social science research concerning the long-term emotional and psychological consequences of removing children from their parents' care and placing them into foster care. The American Association of Pediatrics noted that family separation "can cause irreparable harm, disrupting a child's brain architecture and affecting his or her short- and long-term health. This type of prolonged exposure to serious stress—known as toxic stress—can carry lifelong consequences for children." *Id.* at 526 (additional citations omitted).   As part of this analysis, the article discusses how removal and entry into the foster care system often results in separation of siblings, which heightens the trauma for those children. In particular, the article discusses a study of removed children, which found that "many were reliant on their siblings and upset about being separated from them. One child complained that he had been split up from his brothers and didn't know where they were. Others expressed anger about separation from their absent siblings. While the conversation is usually focused on separating children from their parents, it is important to be cognizant of additional trauma caused by separation from other family members." *Id.* at 533 (internal citations omitted). The author advocates for evaluating the harm of removal as a key part of every child welfare decision and suggests mechanisms to incorporate it as a consideration in existing legal frameworks.

- Adam McCormick, *Siblings in Foster Care: An Overview of Research, Policy, and Practice*, 4 J. of Pub. Child Welfare 198 (2010), https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15548731003799662?scroll=top&needAccess=true

This article reviews empirical data on siblings in foster care and provides an overview of the policies and practices that are relevant to sibling placements in the child welfare system. The author notes that "[s]eparating siblings who have been removed from their parents only seems to intensify the pain, grief, and trauma that they have already experienced when they were initially removed from their parents" and can be "considered a form of revictimization." *Id.* at 207. For examples, he cites to a study that compared children placed with a least one sibling to completely separated siblings, which found a "strong negative association between sibling separation and the mental health of siblings, specifically females. Co-resident girls had a lower presence of any mental disorder, as well as fewer ''total problems'' and ''externalizing problems." *Id.* at 211-212.

- Adam McCormick, *The Role of the Sibling Relationship in Foster Care: A Comparison of Adults with a History of Childhood Out-of-Home Placement* (2009) (Dissertation, St. Edward's University in Austin, TX)

This dissertation analyzes the experiences of 50 adults who had out-of-home placements as children (such as a foster care placement), focusing on the correlation between childhood sibling experiences and adult outcomes. In order to assess the strength of childhood sibling relationships and later adult outcomes, the study looked at a number of variables, including age, gender, number of placements, and age at placement. The study ultimately found that those who had greater access to their siblings during their youth had higher levels of social support, self-esteem, and income as adults. The study describes research about the importance of protective sibling relationships for children in out-of-home care, noting that "siblings can play a critical role in repairing and minimizing the psychological damage of instability, separation, and trauma caused by one's parents." *Id.* at 6. The study further notes that "[s]eparating siblings who have been removed from their parents only seems to intensify the pain, grief, and trauma that they have already experienced when they were initially removed from their parents. Many feel that separating children from their siblings can be considered a form of revictimization." *Id.*

- Susan L. Smith, *Siblings in Foster Care and Adoption: What We Know from Research*, in Deborah N. Silverstein & Susan L. Smith, Eds., *Siblings in Adoption and Foster Care: Traumatic Separations and Honored Connections* (Praeger Pub. 2009), https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2009-11027-000

This book chapter discusses research about sibling relationships and implications for child-welfare practices. It notes that, when children are entering the foster care system or other adoption processes, being placed with their siblings "promotes a sense of safety and well-being, while being separated from them can trigger grief and anxiety." *Id.* at 20. In contrast, "a foster youth advisory team described separation from siblings as being like an extra punishment, a separate loss, and another pain that is not needed." *Id.* (internal citations omitted). Next, the chapter analyzes outcomes of siblings placed together and apart, finding those placed together have a much more positive adjustment. While acknowledging the frequent challenges of joint placements for siblings in the child welfare system, the author nonetheless stresses the importance of making exceptional efforts to do so.

- Elizabeth Timberlake & Elwood Hamlin, *The Sibling Group: A Neglected Dimension of Placement*, 61 Child Welfare 545 (1982)

This article discusses the effects of sibling separation on child development as well as how sibling relationships help children in the welfare system cope with losses of parents and familiar surroundings. It examines the specific separation and loss issues that foster children face and how they can be exacerbated when they also lose their siblings: "Given the reciprocal nature of sibling role relationships, [separated siblings] often feel that they have lost a part of themselves, compounding separation and loss issues associated with foster care. Not only are foster children engaged in the grief process over their absent parents and siblings, they are also denied access to a natural support group within which to resolve their grief." *Id.* at 549. The article concludes that keeping sibling groups intact during foster placement can be "viewed as a potential treatment resource for the child welfare worker in helping children cope." *Id.*

b) Separating siblings leads to identity-formation problems and a lost sense of stability and belonging.

- Bjørn Øystein Angel, *Foster Children's Sense of Sibling Belonging: The Significance of Biological and Social Ties*, 4(1) SAGE Open (2014), https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2158244014529437

This article examines children's perceived sense of belonging to siblings and how their social and biological ties develop their identities as they move into, and sometimes out of, the foster care system. The majority of children involved in the study said that continued relationships with their biological siblings was important for their identity and sense of belonging. Interviews conducted with children in the study also showed that "[c]aring about biological siblings, rivalry and conflict with biological siblings, or having to compare oneself with the foster parents' own children strengthens the children's perception of themselves and their identity, and a sense of belonging becomes a central feature." The author concludes with several practical implications from his findings. First, he urges child welfare services to acknowledge the importance of getting to know each individual child and his or her sibling relationships, before and during the processing of placing the child in a foster home. Second, he stresses this perspective must be maintained throughout the entire period the child is in foster care.

- Laurie Kramer, et al., *Siblings*, Ch. 29, in B. H. Fiese, ed., *APA Handbook of Contemporary Family Psychology* (2019), https://www.depts.ttu.edu/hs/hdfs/research/sibs/docs/Siblings-APA-Handbook-Contemporary-Families_proofs.pdf

This chapter examines how sibling relationships can help promote resilient families. With respect to placement of siblings in foster care specifically, the authors discuss how growing literature reflects that maintaining sibling relationships through joint placement or other means can provide many developmental benefits, including greater competence in education, occupation, housing, relationships, and civic engagement. "Furthermore, for adolescents in foster care, sibling relationship qualities, such as support, positively predicted aspects of self-concept including acceptance, self-efficacy, psychological maturity, and activity, with the

amount of contact with siblings magnifying the strength of these associations." *Id.* at 5 (internal citations omitted).

- Jonathan Caspi, *Sibling Development: Implications for Mental Health Practitioners* 322 (Springer Pub. 2011)

    This article is a review of existing literature. Authors find that siblings can be a source of "significant social and emotional support, especially during difficult circumstances…[and] having access to and shared experiences with siblings may help sustain family continuity and identity after children are removed from their family of origin. Sibling relations may be of special importance to children from minority populations in preserving their ethnic identity, particularly children placed in families or communities that differ considerably from their own heritage." Given the importance and benefits of sibling relationships, the authors note that best practices call for placing siblings together and for promoting sibling contact when they cannot be together.

- Susan L. Smith, *Siblings in Foster Care and Adoption: What We Know from Research*, in Deborah N. Silverstein & Susan L. Smith, Eds., *Siblings in Adoption and Foster Care: Traumatic Separations and Honored Connections* (Praeger Pub. 2009), https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2009-11027-000

    This book chapter discusses research about sibling relationships and implications for child-welfare practices. With respect to identify formation, the author states that "[c]ontinuity of sibling relationships through conjoint placements helps children to maintain a positive sense of identity and knowledge of their cultural, personal, and family histories. They provide natural support to each other and some sense of stability and belonging. . . thus validating the child's fundamental sense of self-worth." *Id.* at 20 (internal citations omitted).

        c) **Placing siblings together reduces trauma caused by removal from parents.**

- Hon. Leonard Edwards (ret.), *Connecting with Siblings*, Judges' Page Newsl. Archive, Nat'l CASA Ass'n (2011)

    In this article, Judge Leonard Edwards, former Judge-in-Residence at the Center for Families, Children & the Courts, a division of the California Administrative Office of the Courts, discusses the passage of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, and how the law prefers siblings to remain together when removed from parental care and to stay connected when separation occurs. Judge Edwards stresses that "positive results flow from keeping siblings together," including that "the trauma related to parental removal is reduced [and] siblings can provide emotional support for one another." *Id.* at 2. He concludes that because the "law now prefers siblings to remain together when removed from parental care . . ., [t]he burden now shifts to us, the professionals working in the foster care system, to ensure that siblings are placed together—or at least that they maintain contact with one another after removal from parental care." *Id.*

- Adam McCormick, *Siblings in Foster Care: An Overview of Research, Policy, and Practice*, 4 J. of Pub. Child Welfare 198 (2010), https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15548731003799662?scroll=top&needAccess=true

    This article reviews empirical data on siblings in foster care and provides an overview of the policies and practices related to sibling placements in the child welfare system. With respect to how placing siblings together can mitigate the trauma caused by being removed from their parents, the author notes that "siblings can play a critical role in repairing and minimizing the psychological damage of instability, separation, and trauma." *Id.* at 207.

- Sigrid James, et al., *Maintaining Sibling Relationships for Children in Foster and Adoptive Placements*, 30 Child. & Youth Svcs. Rev. 90 (2008), https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/19122749/

    This study examines data from caregivers of 14 foster and adopted children in efforts to better understand the implications of maintaining sibling relationships for child welfare policy and practice. The authors note that children in the welfare system "are considered a population at high risk for adverse outcomes across all domains of functioning . . . [with] rates of emotional and behavioral problems . . . [ranging] from 30 to 80 percent . . . [and] attributed to histories of abuse and neglect, backgrounds of general family dysfunction, parental substance abuse and poverty as well as the potential trauma associated with removal from home." *Id.* at 1 (internal citations omitted). This study includes discussion of the caregivers' decisions in determining whether to keep siblings together. In the majority of joint-placement cases, siblings were viewed as having a positive effect on one another. "One caregiver, who dealt with a difficult and at times violent older sibling, explained that she chose to keep the child in her home to avoid the trauma his removal would cause for the younger siblings, stating: '*He's part of their family; he's what they have left of their family*.'" *Id.* at 9.

d) **Placing siblings together increases the chances of reunification with parents.**

- Vicky Albert & William King, *Survival Analyses of the Dynamics of Sibling Experiences in Foster Care*, 89 Families in Society 533 (2008), https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1606/1044-3894.3819

    This study analyzes reunification rates for sibling groups in foster care and finds that siblings placed completely or partially together reunify at a faster rate than those placed apart. The authors note that, "for the most part and over the long run, intact placement for siblings aids in speeding up the reunification process" and "those placed completely together are less likely to remain in care over the long run than those placed completely apart." *Id.* at 8. The authors thus advocate for practitioners in the child welfare system to base their treatment plans on—in addition to what is best for each individual child—what is best for the sibling unit. The study ultimately concludes that the foster care system would be improved by strengthening efforts to place siblings together, including by providing additional training and monetary incentives to foster parents.

- Jeffrey D. Waid, *Investigating the Impact of Sibling Foster Care on Placement Stability* (2015) (Dissertation, Portland State University), https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3488&context=open_access_etds

    This dissertation used statistical analysis to investigate how family dynamics and home settings impacted the likelihood of foster care placement changes for a sample study of children. Through this analysis, it provides evidence about how sibling co-placement reduces the likelihood of foster care placement changes and increases the likelihood of reunification. For example, it describes a study that tracked permanency outcomes of children who entered foster care and found that siblings places together had better "reunification, guardianship, and adoption outcomes than siblings who were placed in only partially intact groups, children who were completed separated from their siblings, or children who had no siblings in care." *Id.* at 14. The analysis provides support for policies that prioritize co-placing siblings whenever possible and safe to do so, advocating for practitioners to understand that "sibling relationships are a valuable source of support to a child who has been removed from their family" and "provide the opportunity for continued learning and growth in the substitute care placement." *Id.* at 100.

- Sigrid James, et al., *Maintaining Sibling Relationships for Children in Foster and Adoptive Placements*, 30 Child. & Youth Svcs. Rev. 90 (2008), https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/19122749/

    This study examines data from caregivers of 14 foster and adopted children in efforts to better understand the implications of maintaining sibling relationships for child welfare policy and practices. Regarding the specific data reviewed, the study found that, in the majority of joint-placement cases, siblings had a positive influence over one another. For example, younger siblings looked up to older siblings as role models. Additionally, maintaining sibling relationships was a key factor in maintaining family cohesiveness when working towards reunification. The authors note that their findings, although based on a limited data set, support existing research that joint sibling placement generally is viewed favorably by child welfare professionals and youth themselves. They also discuss how joint sibling placement has been linked to several positive child welfare outcomes, including greater placement stability as well as greater likelihood of reunification and adoption.

e) **Placing siblings together increases the chances that children will be adopted.**

- Adam McCormick, *Siblings in Foster Care: An Overview of Research, Policy, and Practice*, 4 J. of Pub. Child Welfare 198 (2010), https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15548731003799662?scroll=top&needAccess=true

    This article reviews empirical data on siblings in foster care and provides an overview of the policies and practices related to sibling placements in the child welfare system. As one example, McCormick notes that research shows children placed with their siblings have more stability in their care compared to those who are separated from siblings. In particular, "[c]hildren who are placed alone either with a history of placement with siblings or with a

history of placement alone, are significantly less likely to be adopted or placed in a subsidized guardianship home, than children who are placed with a consistent number of siblings in all of their placements." *Id.* at 213 (internal citations omitted).

- Susan L. Smith, *Siblings in Foster Care and Adoption: What We Know from Research*, in Deborah N. Silverstein & Susan L. Smith, Eds., *Siblings in Adoption and Foster Care: Traumatic Separations and Honored Connections* (Praeger Pub. 2009), https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2009-11027-000

This chapter discusses research about sibling relationships and implications for child-welfare practices, including placement stability in adoption. The author challenges the view that it is more difficult to place sibling groups with adoptive families compared to single children by citing to a study that came to the opposite conclusion: "A study of over 10,000 children photo-listed for adoption in New York found that members of sibling groups were more likely to be adopted and were placed more quickly than single children. In fact, the time to adoption was decreased by 3.2 months for each additional child in the sibling group." *Id.* at 21-22 (additional citations omitted). After reviewing other studies on adoption disruption, the author finds that— taken as a group—they tend to show reduced disruption risk for siblings who are adopted together.

f) Placing siblings together decreases the likelihood of placement disruptions.

- Becci A. Akin, *Predictors of Foster Care Exits to Permanency: A Competing Risks Analysis of Reunification, Guardianship, and Adoption* (2011) (Dissertation, School of Social Welfare, The University of Kansas), https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/bitstream/handle/1808/6271/Akin_ku_0099D_10908_DATA_1.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

This paper discusses a longitudinal study of children in Kansas who were observed for a period of 30 to 42 months, as well as a general overview of the history of foster care and of existing literature. This study was designed to identify which child and placement characteristics were significant predictors of foster care exit to three types of permanency: reunification, guardianship, and adoption. Importantly, the author found that, "sibling placements were beneficial to permanency when all siblings in placement were kept together consistently and continuously throughout an entire placement episode." *Id*. at 103. The data showed that "the lowest reunification rate occurred for children who had siblings in placement but were completely separated (46.5%). Those who had partially intact sibling placements had a slightly higher reunification rate (48.5%). Children without siblings in placement experienced the next highest reunification rate (50.0%), while children who had siblings in placement and who experienced a completely intact placement with their siblings had the highest rate of reunification (60.4%)." *Id*. at 67. Similarly, "[c]hildren that experienced completely intact sibling placements were the most likely to exit to adoption (19.0%), followed by children that experienced partially intact placements (12.9%), and then children who did not have siblings in placement (i.e., no concurrent foster care episode) (12.3%). The lowest rate of adoption occurred for children who were completely separated from their siblings with concurrent foster care episodes (8.1%)." *Id*. at 72-73. In light of these findings, the author suggests that

"[o]rganizational procedures should aim to place children with kin and siblings whenever possible. Efforts to identify relative placement options could be ramped up by implementing intensive search for relatives and kin during a child's first 72 hours in foster care." *Id*. at 103.

- Kierra M.P. Sattler, et al., *Age-Specific Risk Factors Associated with Placement Instability Among Foster Children*, 84 Child Abuse & Neglect 157 (2018), https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0145213418303004?via%3Dihub

This paper examines the relationship between certain child attributes and case histories with placement disruptions using data relating to approximately 23,700 children in foster care in Texas. Placement disruptions is used to refer to placements that end for reasons associated with the suitability of an existing placement, rather than the desire to place a child in a more policy-preferred setting. The study found that "[p]lacements that have all siblings together had a lower risk of placement mismatch or child-initiated disruption." *Id.* at 13.

- Nancy Rolock & Kevin White, *Post-Permanency Discontinuity*: *A Longitudinal Examination of Outcomes for Foster Youth After Adoption or Guardianship*, 70 Child. & Youth Srvcs. Rev. 419 (2016), https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0190740916303486

This study analyzes child welfare administrative data relating to 51,567 children in Illinois who exited the foster care system through adoption or guardianship. The analysis showed that children placed with siblings were less likely to leave their legally permanent (adoptive or guardianship) homes prior to becoming adults. The study uses the term "post-permanency discontinuity" to describe children who, after adoption or guardianship, reenter the foster care system or otherwise have their guardianship vacated. Of particular note, the study found that "[c]hildren placed with at least one sibling at the time of legal permanence had about 15% lower hazard of experiencing discontinuity as compared to those not placed with at least one sibling." *Id.* at 425. The authors stated that this "is consistent with extant research on the importance of maintaining sibling bonds. Sibling relationships have been found to be a significant source of support throughout the life cycle and associated with increased stability for children in foster care." *Id.* (internal citations omitted)

- Sarah A. Font & Hyunn Woo Kim, *Sibling Separation and Placement Instability for Children in Foster Care*, 27(4) Child Maltreatment 583 (April 2021), Sibling Separation and Placement Instability for Children in Foster Care - PubMed (nih.gov)

Based on analysis of data on 2,297 children over a multi-year period, this study found that sibling separation is positively associated with placement instability. The authors noted this is largely consistent with the work of prior scholars, who have argued sibling separation may compound other relational losses in foster care. "Siblings exert a significant influence on children's functioning: children may look to older siblings as role models, and—in the case of neglectful or abusive family environments—siblings may be primary attachment relationships." *Id.* at 583. The study focused on whether and to what extent sibling placement reduces what the authors refer to as a "non-progress move"—a move "attributed to an underlying problem with the original foster care placement, such as maltreatment in the placement, a child or caregiver requesting that the placement by changed, or a child requiring a more restrictive setting." *Id.* at

584. The analysis showed that "partial separation (placement with some but not all siblings) is not associated with a non-progress move" and therefore may be helpful to consider when it is not possible to place all members of a sibling group together. *Id.* at 591. The study ultimately concludes that sibling separation is associated with increased risk of placement moves for children in foster care, including non-progress moves (which may indicate problems with children's functioning or connection to caregivers) . . . [and] that separation is especially negative for children who have only one known sibling, and that for larger sibling groups, placement with at least one sibling produces similar benefits as placement with all siblings." *Id.* at 593.

g) Siblings in foster care may also look to each other as a unique source of support and help.

- Child Welfare Information Gateway, *Sibling Issues in Foster care and Adoption* (2019). Washington, DC: U.S. Dep't of Health and Human Servs, Admin. for Children & Families, Children's Bureau, https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubpdfs/siblingissues.pdf

This publication discusses how child welfare professionals can positively affect the wellbeing foster care children by enabling them to maintain connections with their siblings. The authors discuss the importance of sibling relationships, the benefits of placing siblings together, and best practices for keeping them together. In terms of benefits, they note that "[s]ibling relationships can provide a significant source of continuity throughout a child's lifetime and can be the longest relationships that most people experience." *Id.* at 2. Additionally, they highlight that "preserving ties with siblings . . . can help buffer children from the negative effects of maltreatment and removal from the home." *Id.* The benefits of sibling support can extend past the time children exit the foster care system and can include "emotional and spiritual support, guidance about college or other opportunities, assistance required due to physical and developmental disabilities, and information about health concerns or history." *Id.* (internal citations omitted).

- Adam McCormick, *Siblings in Foster Care: An Overview of Research, Policy, and Practice*, 4 J. of Pub. Child Welfare 198 (2010), https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15548731003799662?scroll=top&needAccess=true

This article reviews empirical data on siblings in foster care and provides an overview of the policies and practices related to sibling placements in the child welfare system. With respect to the unique support provided by siblings in these environments, the author notes: "Research suggests that the sibling relationship plays a significant role in the lives of children and continues to serve as a source of support and comfort into adulthood. In addition, the sibling relationship can be of even greater significance when children face the unfortunate circumstances of abuse, neglect, and separation from their parents. The sibling relationship is oftentimes the longest lifetime relationship for a person with siblings. In the case of many foster youth, siblings are not only the final remaining family members to lean on for support and comfort, but also the only link to the past." *Id.* at 213. In conclusion, the author urges welfare professionals to "work

towards preserving the only family relationship that many youth in foster care have"—*i.e.*, their sibling relationships. *Id.* at 215.

h) Placing siblings together reduces depression, self-blame, and anxiety.

- Rebecca L. Hegar, *Kinship Care and Sibling Placement: Child Behavior, Family Relationships, and School Outcomes*, 31 Child. & Youth Srvcs. Rev. 670 (2009), https://ideas.repec.org/a/eee/cysrev/v31y2009i6p670-679.html

    This study uses data from the National Study of Child and Adolescent Wellbeing (NSCAW) to examine correlations between kinship foster care, sibling placement, and child welfare outcomes. Substantive findings from the study included the following: (1) "From the viewpoint of the youth, being placed with a sibling was significantly related to lower levels of internalizing problems (e.g., depression, self-blame)"; (2) "girls placed in kinship foster care reported lower levels of externalizing behaviors (e.g., anger, aggression) than did girls placed in non-kinship settings"; and (3) "children and youth who are placed with one or more siblings are significantly more likely than others to feel emotionally supported, to feel close to a primary caregiver . . . and to like living with the people in the home." *Id.* at 676.

- Sabrina M. Richardson & Tuppett Yates, *Siblings in Foster Care: A Relational Path to Resilience for Emancipated Foster Youth*, 47 Child. & Youth Srvcs. Rev. 378 (2014), https://adlab.ucr.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Richardson-Yates-2014.pdf

    Using data from 170 recently emancipated youth from the California foster care system between the ages of 17 and 21, this study investigates the correlation between sibling co-placements during foster care with subsequent educational and occupational competence, housing quality, relational adjustment, and civic engagement. It analyzes these outcomes in relation to the proportion of time which a child had spent placed with, versus separated from, his or her siblings. In particular, the authors found that "the presence of a sibling is typically associated with better proximal outcomes in foster care . . . [such as] fewer symptoms of anxiety and depression." *Id.* at 379 (internal citations omitted).

- Bilha Davidson-Arad & Adva Klein, *Comparative Well Being of Israeli Youngsters in Residential Care With and Without Siblings,* 33 Child. & Youth Srvcs. Rev. 2152 (2011), https://ideas.repec.org/a/eee/cysrev/v33y2011i11p2152-2159.html

    This study compares the wellbeing and self-esteem of 91 Israeli youth between 12-14 years of age who were placed with their siblings (referred to as "intact care") in residential facilities with those who were placed without their siblings (referred to as "separate care"). As used in the study, the term "wellbeing" refers to the children's "psychological, social, cultural and physical quality of life. Special attention is given to self-esteem in light of claims that being in care with a sibling may alleviate or compensate for the detrimental impact of removal from home to children's self-esteem." *Id.* at 2153. The data used came directly from the children participating in the study through questionnaires they completed. The study ultimately found that those in care with siblings reported greater wellbeing than those in care alone. *Id.* at 2156.

- Adam McCormick, *The Role of the Sibling Relationship in Foster Care: A Comparison of Adults with a History of Childhood Out-of-Home Placement* (2009) (Dissertation, St. Edward's University in Austin, TX)

    This dissertation analyzes the experiences of 50 adults who had out-of-home placements as children (such as a foster care placement), focusing on the correlation between childhood sibling experiences and adult outcomes. The study describes existing research about the importance of protective sibling relationships for children in out-of-home care, noting that "siblings can play a critical role in repairing and minimizing the psychological damage of instability, separation, and trauma caused by one's parents." *Id.* at 6. The study further notes that "[s]eparating siblings who have been removed from their parents only seems to intensify the pain, grief, and trauma that they have already experienced when they were initially removed from their parents." *Id.* Moreover, existing studies have shown that at a time children are separated from their parents "when such emotions as fear, confusion, and anxiety are heightened, the presence of a sibling may be the only predictable factor in a child's life" and thus can "play a critical role in reducing the negative effects of parental loss." *Id.* at 26 (internal citations omitted). In this study, in order to assess the strength of childhood sibling relationships and later adult outcomes, the author looked at a number of variables, including age, gender, number of placements, and age at placement. The specific research question he sought to address is whether "adults who had an experience of out-of- home placement as children who report having greater access to and closer relationships with their siblings have more positive outcomes those who do not." *Id.* at 34. The study ultimately found that those who had greater access to their siblings during their youth had higher levels of social support, self-esteem, and income as adults.

- Armeda Stevenson Wojciak, Lenore M. McWey, & Jeffery Waid, *Sibling Relationships of Youth in Foster Care: A Predictor of Resilience*, 84 Child. & Youth Srvcs. Rev. 247 (2018), https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0192513X18758345

    Using data from 246 children who attended a non-profit organization's summer camp program, this study investigates the correlation between a positive sibling relationship and resilience for youth in the foster care system. As part of its analysis, the authors discuss another study of resilience within the foster care system, which found that youth with higher resilient adaptation "had higher levels of self-esteem and lower levels of depression." *Id.* at 247-48 (internal citations omitted). The study ultimately found that a "warm sibling relationship" promoted individual resilience for middle childhood and adolescence development periods. Accordingly, the authors stress that this study demonstrates that "more should be done to promote warm sibling relationships for youth in foster care." *Id.* at 253.

    i) **Keeping siblings together improves each child's educational competence and reduces behavioral issues in the classroom.**

- Sabrina M. Richardson & Tuppett Yates, *Siblings in Foster Care: A Relational Path to Resilience for Emancipated Foster Youth*, 47 Child. & Youth Srvcs. Rev. 378 (2014), https://adlab.ucr.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Richardson-Yates-2014.pdf

Using data from 170 recently emancipated youth from the California foster care system between the ages of 17 and 21, this study investigates the correlation between sibling co-placements during foster care with subsequent educational and occupational competence, housing quality, relational adjustment, and civic engagement. It analyzes these outcomes in relation to the proportion of time which a child had spent placed with, versus separated from, his or her siblings. Evaluation of educational outcomes were based on a youth's attained level of education, GPA, and school conduct, as well as stated educational values and aspirations. Low levels of competence were marked by dropping out without a diploma and with no plans to pursue further education. Moderate levels of competence were marked by a diploma or GED and clear plans to pursue post-secondary education or training. And the highest levels of competence were marked by attendance and success at community college or a four-year university. The study found that "[s]ibling co-placement [was] uniquely associated with higher educational competence," especially for male children. *Id.* at 383.

- Brianne Kothari et al., *A Longitudinal Analysis of School Discipline Events Among Youth in Foster Care*, 93 Child. & Youth Srvcs. Rev. 117 (2018), https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8204670/pdf/nihms-1597058.pdf

This paper discusses a study of school discipline-related problems for students in foster care, evaluating which factors make a student more likely to be disciplined in school. Looking at 315 youth within the Oregon Department of Education, the study found that sibling separation is directly linked to an increase in disruptive behaviors at school, resulting in higher school discipline events for separated siblings. Specifically, the study concluded that "living apart from one's sibling increased the odds of youth experiencing school discipline events by [greater than] 65%." *Id.* at 12. Children in foster care are, on average, three times more likely than their peers to experience discipline events in school. The paper notes that these discipline events can have larger repercussions on a student's education, including dropping out of school, repeating a grade, and becoming engaged in delinquent and criminal behavior. As a result, finding ways to decrease the incidence of disciplinary events that students in foster care experience is important to the students' educational outcomes.

- Rebecca L. Hegar & James A. Rosenthal, *Foster Children Placed with or Separated from Siblings: Outcomes Based on a National Sample*, 33 Child. & Youth Srvcs. Rev. 1245 (2011), https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0190740911000661?via%3Dihub

This paper discusses a study of children in foster care who have siblings, drawing data from a large, national U.S. database. Using three categories of sibling placement (with all siblings, with some siblings, with no siblings), the study looks at school performance and incidence of behavioral problems, as reported by foster parents, teachers, and the children themselves. The largest impact of sibling placement noted is school performance as rated by teachers. "School performance of children placed with all siblings exceeded" the performance both of children placed alone and those placed with only some siblings. *Id.* at 1250. This study improved on past research by taking a "child-centered" definition of siblings, in which all those whom a child considered to be their siblings were counted as such. It also measured the effect of

partial sibling separation, noting that academic performance was highest for children placed with all of their siblings.

j) Keeping siblings together improves adulthood social skills.

- Lew Bank et al., *Intervening to Improve Outcomes for Siblings in Foster Care: Conceptual, Substantive, and Methodological Dimensions of a Prevention Science Framework*, 39 Child. & Youth Srvcs. Rev. 8 (2014), https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3951129/

This paper provides an interdisciplinary literature review of various studies on the effects of sibling co-placement on general child welfare outcomes. It concludes that, based on a survey of the field, placement of children with their siblings "provide[s] important opportunities for youth to learn and practice social skills and to develop strategies for negotiation, conflict resolution, and cooperative activity in familiar and unfamiliar settings." *Id.* at 2. These in turn improve adulthood skills for foster care alumni. The paper therefore recommends a policy approach that supports a robust focus on supporting siblings in foster care.

- Sabrina M. Richardson & Tuppett Yates, *Siblings in Foster Care: A Relational Path to Resilience for Emancipated Foster Youth*, 47 Child. & Youth Srvcs. Rev. 378 (2014), https://adlab.ucr.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Richardson-Yates-2014.pdf

Using data from 170 recently emancipated youth from the California foster care system between the ages of 17 and 21, this study investigates the correlation between sibling co-placements during foster care with subsequent adult outcomes. It analyzes these outcomes in relation to the proportion of time which a child had spent placed with versus separated from their siblings. In addition to the educational outcomes, the study addressed the occupational competence, housing competence, relationship competence, and civic engagement of young adults who had recently been emancipated from the foster system. It found that, absent placement with siblings, many children in foster care lack the meaningful relationships that allow them to develop "narrative coherence." *Id.* at 384-85. This skill allows children to contextualize their experiences and emotions into a larger narrative, fostering emotional resilience. Narrative coherence was much higher in male children who had been placed with siblings. In turn, high narrative coherence was strongly correlated with high occupational, housing, and relationship competence, as well as higher levels of civic engagement.

2. **If siblings cannot be placed together, children's best interests are served by frequent visitation.**

   a) **Maintaining sibling relationships requires regular contact when they are not placed together.**

- Child Welfare Information Gateway, *Sibling Issues in Foster Care and Adoption* (2019), Washington, DC: U.S. Dep't of Health & Human Services, Admin. for Child. & Fam., Children's Bureau, https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubpdfs/siblingissues.pdf

This publication discusses how child welfare professionals can positively affect the wellbeing of children in foster care by maintaining their connections with their siblings. The publication discusses the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (Fostering Connections Act), which mandates that States make reasonable efforts to maintain sibling connections. This either means placing siblings in the same home or, when that is not possible, providing frequent visitation and ongoing contact. It also notes that, while the Children's Bureau Guidance on the Fostering Connections Act (available at http://www.acf. hhs.gov/programs/cb/resource/pi1011) "allows agencies to set standards for the frequency of visits," it "designates that these should be at least monthly." *Id* at 6. As such, the majority of States have statutes governing requirements for frequency of visits or other communication between separated siblings. The publication also provides examples of practices to help maintain relationships between separated siblings, including: placing them in the same neighborhood or school district; arranging for other forms of contact such as emails, social media, and phone calls; and planning joint summer or weekend activities.

- Mass. Dep't of Child. & Fam., *Sibling Bill of Rights* (2012), https://archives.lib.state.ma.us/bitstream/handle/2452/680688/ocn983206271.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

The Massachusetts Department of Children and Families' "Sibling Bill of Rights" recognizes the importance of sibling relationships and is intended to guide practitioners in the foster care system. In particular, it states that: "sibling relationships provide needed continuity and stability during a child's placement"; "sibling separation is a significant and distinct loss that must be repaired by frequent and regular contact"; and "every foster child deserves the right to know and be actively involved in his/her siblings' lives absent extraordinary circumstances."

b) Children desire more contact with siblings after separation.

- Christine M. Helfrich, Lenore McWey & Armeda Stevenson Wojciak, *Sibling Relationships and Internalizing Symptoms of Youth in Foster Care*, 35 Child. & Youth Srvcs. Rev. 1071 (2013), https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0190740913001448

This study uses data from a nationally representative sample of 152 adolescents in foster care to investigate how sibling relationships can help mediate the relationship between trauma and expression of internalizing symptoms. "[O]f adolescents studied, 73.7% were currently separated from their sibling. Of those who were not living with their sibling, 72.4% saw their sibling monthly or less frequently with 29.5% reporting never having any contact with their sibling. However, 75.0% of the youth reported wanting more contact than they currently have with their sibling." *Id.* at 1073.

- Armeda Wojciak, et al., *Sibling Relationship in Foster Care: Foster Parent Perspective*. 39(9) J. of Family Issues 2590 (2018), https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X18758345

This qualitative study involves 15 foster parents and examines their views on the importance of the sibling relationship. Overwhelmingly participants felt that siblings should be placed together and they noted negative behaviors when siblings were separated, including increased anxiety.

Participants also noted the importance of sibling visitation if siblings are separated but noted that visits should be unsupervised and kid-led, and that visitation should never be cancelled as a punishment. Participants understood the unique role of siblings and felt that foster parents should "facilitate as many opportunities as possible and build as many informal connections for opportunities or abilities for them to connect." Overall foster parents in this study felt that sibling relationships "should be protected and should be a higher priority in the system" and they offered ideas for promoting sibling relationships including foster parent collaboration, educating foster parents on the history of a sibling relationship, and larger systemic changes.

- Susan Smith & Jeanne Howard, *Promoting Successful Adoptions,* 4 Practice with Troubled Families (Sage Pub. 1999), https://books.google.mg/books?id=2Bs5DQAAQBAJ&printsec=copyright&source=gbs_pub_info_r#v=onepage&q&f=false

    This book focuses on adoptive families after the legal finalization of the adoption has taken place and contains many case examples, practice strategies, and resources. The authors incorporate findings from their own research with existing empirical research. One of the chapters focuses in particular on sibling connections and how they are impacted by adoption processes. The authors stress that often the "strongest, most positive attachments that children coming through the child welfare system have experienced are to siblings" with whom they can "form strong bonds of dependence and loyalty." *Id.* at 103. As such, "[e]ven many years after adoption, children may sustain feelings of responsibility or longing for siblings." *Id.* As examples, the authors describe children who "yearned for visits with siblings whom they may not have seen for 8 years or longer" and one child who "ran away trying to locate siblings from whom she had been separated." *Id.* The authors therefore stress the importance of facilitating sibling relationships after adoption.

- William Patton & Sara Latz, *Severing Hansel from Gretel: An Analysis of Siblings' Association Rights*, 48 U. Miami L. Rev. 744 (1994), https://repository.law.miami.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1837&context=umlr

    This article emphasizes the need to provide protections to siblings who enter the foster care system or adoptive homes. As part of their analysis, the authors discuss the importance of sibling bonds as well as issues with judicially ordered separate sibling placements. Regarding the power of sibling relationships, the authors note that "siblings provide a family subsystem which lasts a lifetime, often for 60 to 80 years, and grieving over a lost sibling may be lifelong. . . . A sibling relationship can be an independent emotionally supportive factor for children in ways quite distinctive from other relationships, and there are benefits and experiences that a child reaps from a relationship with his or her brother(s) or sister(s) which truly cannot be derived from any other. It is quite telling that more siblings separated from their natural families search for their biological siblings than search for their biological parents. One of the most frequent reasons children run away from foster homes is to visit siblings." *Id.* at 780 (internal citations omitted). The authors conclude by stressing that siblings should not be separated without adequate due processing hearings and without a showing of necessity.

- Randi Mandelbaum, *Delicate Balances: Assessing the Needs and Rights of Siblings in Foster Care to Maintain Their Relationships Post-Adoption*, 41 N.M. L. Rev. 1 (2011), https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmlr/vol41/iss1/3/

  This article discusses the tension between balancing the importance of permanency for children in the child welfare system (*i.e*., finding them a new and permanent family) with enabling them to maintain sibling relationships. It outlines: federal and state statutes relating to post-adoption sibling contact; how courts have addressed some of these issues; social science research relating to the issues; and potential reforms for child welfare and adoption laws and policies. In discussing these issues, the author stresses that the importance of sibling relationships do not evaporate after a child is adopted and "psychologists opine that separation without contact leads to curiosity, concern, and longing." *Id.* at 8 (internal citations omitted).

c) Frequent sibling visitation leads to better mental health, social competence and sense of stability and belonging.

- Family Futures Practice Paper Series, *Assessing Sibling Placements* (2019), https://www.familyfutures.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Practice-Paper-Siblings-June-2019.pdf

  This paper is authored by Family Futures, a non-profit group in the United Kingdom that has worked with adopted and foster care children for over 20 years. While the authors emphasize that the best way to place siblings according to their needs is to perform individualized assessments of each child and that placements should ultimately be driven by individual circumstances, they maintain that "should siblings be separated, maintaining reasonable levels of contact is essential for the future mental health and wellbeing of the child." *Id*. at 27.

- National Center for Child Welfare Excellence (NCCWE), Practice Component No. 6, *Sibling Visits and Contacts*, http://www.nccwe.org/toolkits/siblings/component-6.html

  This publication by the National Center for Child Welfare Excellence (NCCWE) examines the importance of sibling relationships and visitation. While the authors acknowledge there may be valid reasons for not placing siblings together in foster care, they stress that when that happens facilitating regular contact between siblings is critical to their wellbeing. "When children are not placed together, visits and other ongoing contacts can help maintain the attachment to family and lessen the trauma of being placed apart. When visits are regular and frequent, and allow opportunity to connect in a meaningful way, they have many of the same benefits of sibling placement together: less trauma and loss, greater feelings of belonging, and shared history." Additionally, the publication outlines sibling visitation requirements and policies for various U.S. States.

- Rebecca McBride, *Keeping Siblings Connected: A White Paper on Siblings in Foster Care and Adoptive Placements in New York State*, New York State Off. of Child. & Fam. Servs. (2007), https://affcny.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/12/siblingwhitepaper.pdf

This paper discusses how sibling bonds are critical to children's development and emotional well-being because those bonds help shape their identity and sense of belonging in the world. The paper addresses the benefits and challenges of placing siblings together as well as best practices for sibling visitation plans when co-placement is not feasible. When siblings are placed separately in New York, agencies are required to make reasonable efforts to facilitate biweekly in-person contact between siblings, unless it would be harmful to their health or safety or unless precluded by geographic proximity. "When visits are regular and frequent, and allow opportunity to connect in a meaningful way, they have many of the same benefits of sibling placement together: less trauma and loss, feeling of belonging, shared history, opportunity to work through problems." This paper makes recommendations on how to improve these types of sibling visits. *Id.* at 10-14.

- Sabrina M. Richardson & Tuppett Yates, *Siblings in Foster Care: A Relational Path to Resilience for Emancipated Foster Youth*, 47 Child. & Youth Srvcs. Rev. 378 (2014), https://adlab.ucr.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Richardson-Yates-2014.pdf

Using data from 170 recently emancipated youth from the California foster care system between the ages of 17 and 21, this study investigates the correlation between sibling co-placements during foster care with subsequent educational and occupational competence, housing quality, relational adjustment, and civic engagement. It analyzes these outcomes in relation to the proportion of time which a child had spent placed with, versus separated from, their siblings. In discussing their findings, the authors stress that efforts should be made "to preserve positive sibling connections for foster youth to facilitate youth's narrative meaning making, experiential integration, and, by extension, psychosocial adjustment." *Id.* at 385.

- Mary A. Herrick & Wendy Piccus, *Sibling Connections: The Importance of Nurturing Sibling Bonds in the Foster Care System*, 27 Child. & Youth Srvcs. Rev. 845 (2005), https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0190740904002646

This paper is authored by two child welfare researchers, who both spent a significant amount of time in foster care in their youth, both together and separated from siblings. From their unique perspective, they examine the positive effect that sibling connections can have on children who enter the system and often experience anxiety, trauma, and loss of identity. In their analysis, the authors note that sibling connections can "provide a way of ensuring that children remain in touch with their past, enhance their sense of belonging, provide them with the framework for developing an identity and increase their sense of self-esteem." *Id.* at 852 (internal citations omitted).

d) **Frequent sibling contact leads to better financial circumstances later in life.**

- Sabrina M. Richardson & Tuppett Yates, *Siblings in Foster Care: A Relational Path to Resilience for Emancipated Foster Youth*, 47 Child. & Youth Srvcs. Rev. 378 (2014), https://adlab.ucr.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Richardson-Yates-2014.pdf

Using data from 170 recently emancipated youth from the California foster care system between the ages of 17 and 21, this study investigates the correlation between sibling co-

placements during foster care with subsequent adult outcomes. It analyzes these outcomes in relation to the proportion of time which a child had spent placed with versus separated from their siblings. In addition to the positive correlations with educational and relationship competence already discussed, the study also found positive relations between sibling co-placements and later "housing quality [and] occupational competence" of the siblings as adults. *Id.* at 382.

- Christine M. Helfrich, Lenore McWey & Armeda Stevenson Wojciak, *Sibling Relationships and Internalizing Symptoms of Youth in Foster Care*, 35 Child. & Youth Srvcs. Rev. 1071 (2013), https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0190740913001448

This study uses data from a nationally representative sample of 152 adolescents in foster care to investigate how sibling relationships can help mediate the relationship between trauma and expression of internalizing symptoms. The authors discuss how facilitating positive sibling relationships for children in foster care can help improve their outcomes when they age out of the system. In particular, they note that sibling support "may offset some of the negative outcomes that youth who age out of the foster care system, such as homelessness, often face." *Id.* at 1075 (internal citations omitted).