

Key Messages

What is known about the placement and outcomes of siblings in foster care?

These key messages are based on an international literature review published in February 2017 by the Rees Centre for Research in Fostering and Education at the University of Oxford. We looked to see what research has taken place on this topic, what we can learn from that existing research and in what areas more research may be needed.

What is the issue?

Around 13% of children and young people entering care, assessed as needing to be placed with siblings, are placed apart from them. This review aims to provide a more robust evidence base for decision-making in children in care services. It brings together existing evidence from studies looking at factors associated with the decision to place siblings together or apart. It considers the evidence on a range of outcomes for joint or separate foster placements.

Call to Action

The findings from this review support the legislation that requires local authorities to place siblings who enter care together where possible, subject to welfare considerations of the children.

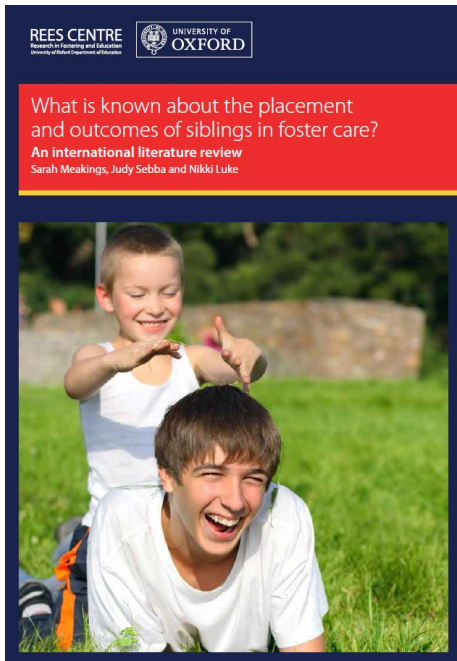
However, in a significant minority of cases, this is not happening in practice. To meet this requirement, the following points should be considered:

Social workers

- Involve young people more in placement decisions. Involving young people in their placement decision leads to better outcomes and this applies equally to sibling group placements.

Fostering providers

- Recruit foster carers who are able and willing to foster sibling groups, such as those with greater housing capacity, and those with more experience in caring for multiple children with a range of needs. Foster carers should help facilitate contact between siblings placed apart where appropriate.
- Identify incentives for foster carers to take sibling groups. Consider financial benefits, training and adequate support.
- To help inform service planning, consider the developing body of evidence around the impact of intervention programmes designed to support siblings in foster care. The intervention studies in this review show promising early findings in relation to the greater frequency of sibling co-placements, but also improved quality of the sibling relationship for children in foster care.



What is known about the placement and outcomes of siblings in foster care? An international literature review by Sarah Meakings, Judy Sebba and Nikki Luke.

The full report can be read and downloaded for free:
<http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/research/publications/>

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Rees Centre for Research in Fostering and Education

University of Oxford
Department of Education
15 Norham Gardens
Oxford OX2 6PY
Tel 01865 274050

<http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk>

Twitter @ReesCentre
<https://www.facebook.com/reescentreoxford>

What did we do?

A search of the international research on this topic provided 18 studies, 15 from the US, 2 from Australia and one from Canada. The main focus was on studies which looked at outcomes for siblings placed together or apart in foster care.

We asked the following question:

What is known about the placement and outcomes of siblings in foster care?

What did we find out?

- The definition of 'sibling' was not consistent across services or studies.

Factors associated with the initial decision to place siblings together or apart

- Siblings who enter care at the same time are more likely to be placed together and those that initially are placed together are more likely to remain together.
- Siblings who are younger (12 years or under), those closer in age and those of the same gender are more likely to be placed together.
- Larger sibling groups are less likely to be placed together than smaller groups, though more likely than smaller groups to be placed with at least one sibling.
- Sibling groups are more likely to be together in kinship care than in 'stranger' foster care.

Outcomes for siblings placed together or apart

- Sibling groups placed together experienced greater stability of placement, although not all the studies that considered stability demonstrated this.
- Older children separated from siblings, after having been in placement with them, were found to be at particular risk of placement disruption and a poor sense of belonging.
- Siblings placed together are more likely to reunify with the birth family and to reunify more quickly, particularly when they enter care at a similar time to one another.
- For certain children in certain conditions, sibling placements together were associated with more favourable mental health outcomes.
- Only two of the 18 studies looked at educational outcomes and both report a positive association between educational outcomes and being placed together.