

Double the Kids ...

By Amy Levin-Epstein

“Parents of multiples have triple the divorce rate.”

This was the statement that mega-multiple mom Kate Gosselin made on the premiere of the fifth season of *TLC's Jon & Kate Plus 8*, before tearfully adding “I was thinking we were going to beat that.” Of course, Kate and her husband Jon have since split, and her statement left multiple moms wondering—is it true? Even though the experts and parents interviewed for this story admit that it’s hard to tell if marital stress would be any different with one child—or without any children at all—all agreed that it isn’t easy. “We have less time for each other, twice the cooking, diapers, cleanup and expenses. We’re exhausted so we’re more irritable with each other,” says Matt Cohen of Woodbridge, Connecticut, who is the husband of Sarah Meshberg-Cohen and father to their 16-month-old twins. The good news: kids grow up, and you’ll have an empty nest (or at least, a diaper-less house) sooner than you can imagine. And might your marriage even mature through this time? “Of course,” says Pat Malmstrom, twin mom and author of *The Art of Parenting Twins*. “You’ve had a very unusual experience together, a huge life adventure.” In that spirit, here are some tips to will help you divide and conquer—without dividing your union.

Parenting twins or more is like boot camp for your relationship. Here are some survival skills you can use to cope:

Issue: Early On, They Hit You Like (Two or More) Mack Trucks

“When you have one baby, you have these wonderful moments of mastery,” says Joan Friedman, Ph.D., herself a twin and mom of twins, and the author of *Emotionally Healthy Twins*. Un-

fortunately, adds Joan, with two, once you soothe or feed one, the other one is ready to tear your new confidence down.

Solution: Friedman advises couples to speak during the pregnancy about the game plan and “make sure you have help.” And once the babies are born, be specific about what you need from your husband. “Women often wait for their husbands to do something and if they fail, they get mad. They have to be absolutely upfront about what they need and ask [for it] in a nice way,” says Friedman, adding that this team effort will pay off for Dad: “With one baby, the mother takes over initially. But with twins, there are two babies home at the same time, dad has the opportunity to jump right in and bond.”

Issue: You Feel Isolated

When you’re at your wit’s end, your first instinct may be to call other new mom pals. But if they’re not fellow moms of multiples, their cries of “only 5 hours of sleep” may make you feel like crying yourself (you would kill for 3!).

Solution: Join the Club—a mom of multiples support group. Your new pals can act as highly-trained babysitters—and you can reciprocate the favor, making this a safe, economical solution to hiring help or relying on an overwhelmed grandparent. According to Meshberg-Cohen, “We have monthly meetings. Moms can go and talk to other moms of multiples. [These groups] really help.”

Issue: You’re Too Exhausted to Really Connect

“My husband and I both work full-time so by the time we get home, make dinner and clean up, spend quality time



with the kids, give baths, and get the kids to bed, we are extremely tired. Some nights we may have only had a 10-minute conversation without interruption,” say Jessica and her husband Mike Glick of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, who are parenting two sets of twins, ages 4 and 6.

Solution: Reconnect in little ways, says Malmstrom. “One of the best things is to hug. You may not have time to talk. You may not even know what to say.” And remember that your husband isn’t just a babysitter—or another child. “Daily acts of kindness go a long way towards keeping a relationship strong,” says Shelly Flais, M.D., pediatrician, mother of twins and author of the upcoming book that will be released in October called, *Raising Twins from Pregnancy to Preschool*.

Issue: Who is this Man?

If you suspect a veil of sleep deprivation and baby spew isn’t making you see your spouse through rose-colored glasses, you might be right. “Dad will say I try to help but she

Double the Divorce Rate?



“Every union will face real life-issues together, and regardless of the number of kids involved, both parents must work as a team to adapt and roll with things as they come,” says Flais. “When I was pregnant with each set, we worried about finances, but we found that you make it work with what you have,” added Glick.

Issue: You’re Just Not Getting Along

Even with a super husband, occasional help and a support group to call your own, the happiest marriage experiences hit bumps in the road—multiples or no babies at all.

Solution: Besides firming up a sleep schedule so you’re not snapping out of fatigue, remember why you’re here in the first place—love.

“At times, my husband and I take our tiredness or frustrations out on each other, but at the end of the day, we still respect and love each other and tell each other that,” says Glick. And if you need motivation to be cordial, think about who is listening. “Remember that your children look to Mom and Dad to learn about relationships and conflict resolution. They will witness that even when two people love each other very much, they will sometimes disagree—and what is most important for your kids to see is that Mom and Dad work together to resolve the problem and find a solution.” ♥

doesn’t like how I’m feeding the baby, how I’m diapering, what clothes I put on,” says Friedman.

Solution: Realize why you may have turned more critical of your partner, particularly if you were more laid-back pre-pregnancy. “It’s reflective of the mother’s stress. She unwittingly becomes overly critical.” Again, ask for specific help, close your eyes, and think about sending them away...to college.

Issue: Money is Tighter Than Tight

In this economy a lot of families are struggling, and with multiples it can feel like your money woes are multiplied. For example: “At the doctor’s you pay two co-pays,” says Meshberg-Cohen. And that’s not even counting double the medicine when they share bugs.

Solution: It’s unavoidable—kids are expensive and you’ll have to roll with the punches (to your wallet).



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According to the website www.divorcemag.com, by using sources from the U.S. Census Bureau and the National Center for Health Statistics, here’s a sampling of some of the most recently available statistics on marriage and divorce in the United States of America:

- There were approximately 2,230,000 **marriages** in 2005—down from 2,279,000 the previous year, despite a total population increase of 2.9 million over the same period.

- The **divorce rate** in 2005 (per 1,000 people) was 3.6—the lowest rate since 1970, and down from 4.2 in 2000 and from 4.7 in 1990. (The peak was at 5.3 in 1981, according to the *Associated Press*)

- The **marriage rate** in 2005 (per 1,000) was 7.5, down from 7.8 the previous year.

- In 2004, the state with the **highest reported divorce rate** was **Nevada**, at 6.4 (per 1,000). Arkansas was a close second, with a divorce rate of 6.3, followed by Wyoming at 5.3. **The District of Columbia** had the **lowest reported divorce rate**, at 1.7, followed by Massachusetts at 2.2 and Pennsylvania at 2.5. (Figures were not complete for California, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Louisiana, or Oklahoma.)

- 8.1% of coupled households consist of **unmarried heterosexual partners**, according to *The State of Our Unions 2005*, a report issued by the National Marriage Project at Rutgers University. The same study said that only 63% of American children **grow up with both biological parents—the lowest figure** in the Western world.

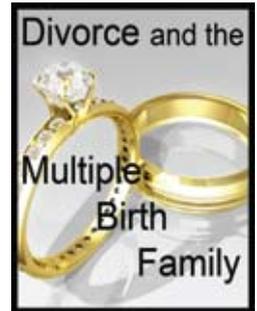
- As of 2003, 43.7% of custodial **mothers** and 56.2% of **custodial fathers** were either separated or **divorced**. And in 2002, 7.8 million Americans paid about \$40 billion in **child and/or spousal support** (84% of the payers were **male**).

- Americans tend to get married more **between June and October** than during the rest of the year. In 2005, **August** had the **most marriages** at about 235,000 or a rate of 9.3 per 1,000 people. The previous year, **July** was the **highest month** at 246,000, or a rate of 9.9; this doubled the **lowest month** in 2004, **January**. ♥



The Divorce and the Multiple Birth Family Survey Findings

MOST (Mothers of Supertwins) started conducting a survey of parents with multiples (twins, triplets, quadruplets, etc.) this past June 25, 2009 regarding the topic of Divorce and the Multiple Birth family. The survey is an ongoing study designed to develop baseline statistics about the prevalence of divorce among multiple birth parents and contains ten multi-part questions on family background, socioeconomic status, parent and children's age, as well as questions about marital status and divorce.



The Research Team Consisted of:

- * Laurie LaMonde, Ph.D., MOST Research Director
- * Marcia W. DiStaso, Ph.D., Assistant Professor at Penn State University
- * Maureen A. Doolan Boyle, MOST Executive Director
- * Laurreta Shokler, MOST Technology Director
- * Kelly Ross, MD, MOST Medical Director, Assistant Professor of Pediatrics, Division of Newborn Medicine Washington University School of Medicine & Pediatric Hospitalist at Missouri Baptist Hospital

Preliminary Survey Findings

A total of 2,849 parents or guardians of multiples completed the MOST Divorce and the Multiple Birth Family survey questionnaire. The majority of survey participants were:

- * Mothers (97.5%)
- * Residents of the United States (93.4%)
- * Predominately Caucasian (92.4%).
- * An average age of 32 when their multiples were conceived.
- * Households with an average of 3 children, mostly families of twins (61%) or triplets (30%).
- * Married for the first time (86%).

Researchers commonly report that the lifetime divorce rate is about 40 to 50 percent for first marriages in the United States, and although it certainly makes sense that parents of multiples would face additional emotional, financial, and medical-related stressors, this study is the first known research examining the divorce rate among this growing population of parents. The survey found:

- * That 4.3% of respondents divorced during the pregnancy or following the birth of multiples (indicating that the divorce rate among this group may not be as high as many have speculated.)
- * Over 95% of the marriages were intact.
- * About 82% of the respondents reported an overall positive level of marital satisfaction.

According to MOST researcher, Dr. Laurie LaMonde, a clinical psychologist and mother of triplets, "Identifying a more accurate divorce rate is important to ease the concerns of multiple birth families as well as to determine if additional services may be beneficial for families that may be at greater risk of marital discord."

Specifically, the Divorce Rate Was:

- * 3.6% for parents with twins
- * 5% for parents with triplets
- * 9.2% for parents with quadruplets
- * 4.2% for parents with quintuplets/sextuplets or multiple sets of multiples

Among those who divorced, the majority of their multiples were between the ages of one and five at the time of divorce. In addition, 4.8% of respondents reported that their marriage involved a history of physical or substance abuse. Of those reporting abuse, marital dissatisfaction ratings were higher and the likelihood of divorce was greater.

www.mostonline.org

The Divorce and the Multiple Birth Family Survey is still available online and can be taken by one parent of multiples per household.

Survey Limitations

Although this preliminary study by MOST indicates that the overall divorce rate among families with multiples is low, it is important to note that this was a convenience sample and therefore may not be representative of the general population of multiple birth parents. Therefore, caution should be made when making inferences from this data to other samples.

In addition to the demographic information presented, the current sample tended to have a more advanced educational level and household income than the general population. The methodology of the study relied on families completing the survey online, which may have limited those without access to a computer.

More systematic research is needed to further assess trends in multiple birth families.

[MOST Resources Related to This Study](#)

MOST offers a variety of support resources for single parents of multiples:

* Online support forums including a single parent group forum

* Personal support through trained staff and volunteers

* Publications containing articles written by single parents and professionals who work with families ♡

8 Tips from a Pro

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Betty Hayes and her husband Eric star on TLC's reality show *Table for 12* (the second season premieres October 26). So, how do they maintain their marriage while raising 4-year-old sextuplets as well as two sets of twins, ages 10 and 12? According to Betty, she got pretty lucky in the daddy department: "I have been very fortunate. I never discussed children with Eric. When we [had children] I was like, hey, he's great--I did really, really well!" But it's not all luck, says Betty: "We definitely have relied on each other as much as possible and we've really become a team." Here's how:

Laugh Together

"I genuinely like him and I think he likes me! When you have kids, it adds a little bit of stress to the whole situation but we still have that same light kind of behavior. I think we'd go out of our minds if we didn't."

Cheer Each Other On

"There are times when I don't feel like doing any more laundry, and he'll be like 'Come on, I'm going to go work on this, you can do some laundry.' And I'll say 'Okay, I'll do it.' He's very uplifting that way."

Embrace Frugality—Together

"We realize that we have to cut back on certain areas. You can't have certain things that you might want, so, between the two of us, we just kind of talk things out. We're not very extravagant. We try not to have a balance on our credit card."

Get Serious About Bedtimes and At-Home Date Nights

"I'm pretty strict with my bedtimes for the little kids. It's time for bed, you go in [and] there's no coming out. After we get everyone into bed, we'll go on the front porch [swinging] and sit there with a glass of wine or a beer or even a soda, and just talk and rock. It's not leaving the house, but it's a sort of mini-date on the [porch]."

Be There For Each Other

"He's not bringing me flowers or giving me foot massages. [But] he comes in the driveway and he doesn't even have to help me, it's just knowing that he's home. I just think, ah, thank God. It's just having him be around. When you have a person who's not in the house, or out, or constantly leaving, that's also stressful."

Keep It Civil—Even When You Feel Anything But

"We never have screaming yelling fights with each other. I don't think I could handle a person who would actually sit here and scream and yell against me in front of the kids."

Don't Micro-Manage

"Even about the house, I'm very laid back. Some women say I could never let him choose the paint color in this room or that room. I could care less."

Don't Dwell On the What Ifs

"I often wonder what it would have been like if I didn't have more after the first two because they're 13 now. Maybe we'd be going on cruises and they'd be coming with us. We do have our 'what if' situations, but we can't dwell on that because we are where we are--and actually we really like where we are." ♡