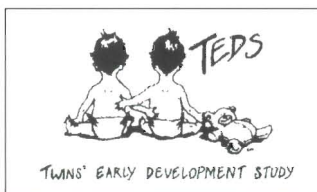


TEDS NEWS

The newsletter for all families taking part in TEDS

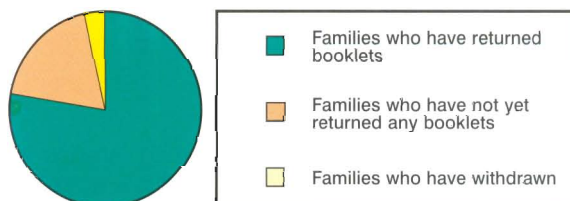


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Welcome to the TEDS Newsletter 2000. Thank you for your continued support.

About us...

TEDS was four years old last September. Since we were first funded we have gathered valuable information from thousands of families, thanks to people like you. Thank you to everyone who has filled out one or all of our booklets – we are thrilled with the response!



We have one year left of this stage of TEDS and are applying for more funding from the Medical Research Council to continue. Although we don't send booklets for the twins' 5th or 6th birthdays, TEDS is still going strong. We plan to continue our contact with you. We are thinking hard about new ways for you to tell us about your family in the future without it being too much work for you!

As the study has grown, so has the TEDS team. Rest assured that all the information you give us is always confidential and all new staff are trained in the TEDS way! If you have any problems, please don't hesitate to let us know.

About You...

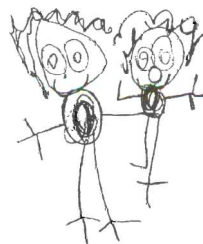
As you know, we encourage as many families as we can with twins born in 1994, '95 and '96 to join us. TEDS already includes families of twins with a variety of backgrounds, views, and abilities, as well as those with identical and non-identical twins, and same and opposite sex twins.

Don't forget to let people know about us if we aren't in contact with them and they have twins of the right age born in England and Wales - whoever and wherever they are. Encourage them to join the rest of the 16,000 TEDS families!

We'd also love to hear about any new members of your family – do the twins have any younger brothers and sisters? Do let us know about them!

What about results?

As we have said before, TEDS is a very big study, and results can be a long time coming. However, we are getting there (slowly!) and we would like to share some of our more recent results with you. Although the scientific focus of TEDS is the issue of nature (genetics) and nurture (environment), we will begin with a few findings that we know are of direct interest to parents of young twins.



Amy, aged 4 years 2 months

Remember, we are impartial - we report only what parents tell us and none of the results reflect a judgement from TEDS.

Results...Results...Results...

One of the most common questions we get asked by TEDS parents is "Are my twins identical or non-identical?"

Of course parents of opposite-sex twins know that their twins are non-identical, and for some other pairs of twins the answer is obvious. However, this is not the case for everybody.

In TEDS, we ask lots of questions about the physical characteristics of the twins, such as hair colour, eye colour, teeth coming through, and what (even tiny) differences you may see. We use this information to tell whether a family has identical or non-identical twins.

Although this may seem just too simple, we have recently finished a little TEDS side-study which was designed to ensure that our questionnaire gave us the information needed to accurately tell whether twins were identical or not. We asked 300 parents to send us cheek swabs, using cotton buds to softly rub the inside of their twins cheeks. We can extract DNA from these swabs. From this DNA, we can find out **almost for sure** (with well over 98% accuracy) *whether twins are identical or not. Our DNA study shows that even when their twins are an average of 18 months old, if the right questions are asked, parents' descriptions of physical similarity are an excellent way of finding out whether twins are identical or non-identical. We find that it can be hard for to them think they can give us enough information even though their descriptions are perfect! This is because parents know their children better than anyone else. This knowledge can sometimes stop them seeing purely physical characteristics because identical twins can be so different in lots of ways (such as personality), just as non-identical twins can be very similar. The main thing to remember is that when we ask our direct questions, parents are more accurate even than they think they are!*

Sometimes parents call to say that they can't believe that we are right about their twins – even though their answers to our questions agree with us! When we ask why they think we are wrong, they often say that their doctor or midwife or another professional told them something else at, or soon after birth. This is usually based on how many placenta there appeared to be. However, information about the placenta is notoriously unreliable. After talking it through, almost all parents say that if the placenta information is wrong, everything else about their twins leads them to agree with us.

Results...Results...Results...

There is often controversy about whether there is ever such a thing as a "secret language" between a pair of twins. 25% of TEDS parents reported that when their twins were three-years old, they did talk in a kind of language that no-one else understood. We just couldn't resist sharing this finding because so many parents have told us of their interest in this issue.

Results...Results...Results...

TEDS is interested in all aspects of development -

whether it be these kind of social issues or more scientific ones.

One of the most interesting scientific findings was described in last year's newsletter – that there seems to be strong genetic influence on language development particularly for children whose language is developing slower than others at 2 years of age. We are finding similar results at 3 years.

We wanted to look at whether TEDS babies born before 32 weeks gestation share this strong genetic influence on their language development. Twins are more likely to be born early, and the general development of premature babies tends to need some time to catch up in the early stages.

From the information you have given us at 2 and 3 years of age, environmental factors seem to be influencing language development for these premature twins more than genetic factors. However, as the babies grow up, the effects of prematurity on development lose their grip, and the genetic story becomes the same as that for babies born later than 32 weeks.

If you are interested in reading further, please ask to be added to our publications mailing list.

Who to contact?

TAMBA is a national charity supporting families with twins, offering information booklets, a regular magazine, discounted holidays and days out, as well as professional guidance from a team of medical and education consultants.

Write to Gina Siddons TAMBA, Harnott House, 309 Chester Road, Little Sutton, South Wirral, CH66 1QQ.

The Multiple Births Foundation (MBF) is a national charity offering specialised support to parents and relevant professionals who are concerned with twins, triplets and more. There are clinics offering professional advice to parents, a telephone help-line and many other support services.

Write to: MBF, Queen Charlotte's and Chelsea Hospital, Goldhawk Road, London, W6 0XG.

Our freephone line is always there for you (there's an answerphone too) if you have any questions.



Cut here

It is very important to us that we stay in touch with you. Please let us know if the address this newsletter was sent to is the incorrect address, or if you move in the future. You can let us know by filling in this slip, writing to us, or calling us on our freefone line (number at the top of this newsletter).

Your name..... Names of your twins..... and

Your previous address.....

New address.....

.....

New postcode..... New telephone number.....