



Twin Peaks

You've heard of pre-school playgroups and Chinese playgroups. But did you know there's a playgroup specially for twins and triplets? **Sandra Chua** talks to the parents of this unusual (and crowded) gathering of tots.

Why would families with twins, triplets and other multiples need a support group? That was our first question when we heard about Twins Plus, a parent-support group that has about 40 members.

Barbara Potgieter, an expatriate wife who is the current facilitator of the support group, explains: "It's a chance for parents to get together and speak to others in the same situation. We discuss any problems we may be having and get advice."

Barbara is the mother of two-year-old twins, a boy and a girl. The

group is largely made up of women, although there is one father. He's the main at-home caregiver while his wife works. The majority of members are expatriates, although there are a few locals.

"We encourage mothers to join when they are still pregnant as twin pregnancies can have many complications," she says. "We can help to answer questions like 'Is it normal for one baby to move more than the other?', 'Do I need two of everything?' And one of the biggest problems is premature labour. We like our members to be aware of the early warning signs, which can be subtle. The uterus is stretched so far that it's hard to feel contractions until they get serious."

"Parents with small children have issues like toilet training two or three simultaneously, whether or not to separate the children for pre-school,

whether they should be dressed identically, how to deal with people who refer to them as "the twins" rather than by their names, how to encourage each child to be an individual as well as to maintain that special bond with the other twin and so on."

It's Expensive Raising Multiple Kids

There are some members who volunteer to field telephone calls from other members with questions, and a small library of books that can be borrowed as well as a useful list of websites.

Every six months a sale of used equipment and clothing is held. It can be very expensive raising multiples. Buying second-hand from other members helps with the family budget. Cribs, high chairs, double or triple strollers and matching outfits go on the block on weekends.



foot the expenses for snacks and drinks. Apart from the zero cost factor, the reason Twins Plus is successful and growing (there were 15 members two years ago) can perhaps be attributed to the fact that families with multiples really welcome support.

"Oh, we never say 'No' to help!" laughs Barbara. "There's no need to be a hero when help's available. Seriously, people say 'double trouble' when they see twins. While no parent of multiples will tell you that it's easy or that it's less trouble than raising singletons, it's really 'multiple joy' that's the more appropriate comment."

If you'd like to join Twins Plus, call Barbara at 271-8922 or e-mail pongrjeter@pacific.net.sg.

cushions: Ikea photos of mums & babies in the Twins Plus playgroup by Kevin Cuff

Meet and eat!

The group meets one morning a month for about two hours. Usually, eight to 10 members show up at the meeting, which is held at a member's home.

About six members have volunteered to take turns to host meetings, which requires a large living room and often a garden for the children to play in.

There is no set agenda. Children have free play while parents sit and talk. The host family provides food and drink.

Barbara keeps in touch with members through a combination of e-mail, snail mail and phone calls. Turnover is quite high, due to expatriate families leaving for other postings. The bulk of the current members have babies and toddlers. Families with older multiples find it difficult to attend the meetings once their children begin attending schools.

Support network

There is no joining or subscription fee. Even meetings are free, as host families

FACT FILE

According to Twins Plus, Asians have the lowest rate of twins in the world, with only one in 350 births yielding twins (mainly identical). In the USA, the frequency is 1:90 and in Nigeria, it's 1:22!

With modern fertility treatments, twins are becoming more common, and higher order multiples (triplets, quadruplets and more) are not as rare as they once were. In Singapore, sextuplets — one girl and five boys — were born to an Indonesian couple, Andre and Susan Prijono, on November 27, 1998.

"I wish I had four pairs"

One day Veene Anderson was a mother of one and the next, she became the mother of four. Triplets Hanifa Neyna, Ronen Aashiq and Rashad Pandian arrived in July and since then, she's hardly had a moments' peace.

"There is no typical day," says Veene as she wrestles with one or another baby. "I'm a wreck. My husband Ricardo and I are lucky if we manage four hours' sleep a day. We seem to be working around the clock."

Veene was breastfeeding all three but found that she couldn't keep it up. While feeding one, the other two would be wailing with hunger and that would get her all agitated. "I tried feeding two at once but I just couldn't get comfortable," she says. All three have just been weaned off the breast and on to the bottle but not without hiccups. They've been burping up more than normal. Veene has been trying different brands of milk powder to find out which one suits them.

At two months, the babies seem to have fallen into a routine of starting their day at about 5.30am. Each takes about 30 minutes to feed and then it's time for another feed at 9am. They have their baths at midday before having another bottle. 1.30pm to 4pm is quiet time as they settle down for a long nap. "If I'm lucky," says Veene. "More often than not, one will be fussy, one will vomit and one will need a nappy change. I wish I had four pairs of hands!"

This busy mother eats on the go. "I usually have my meals at the same time that I'm cleaning the flat," she laughs. Ricardo works as a musician



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Photos: Ilexa photos of mums & babes in the Twin Plus playgroup by Kelvin Cuff

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and he's sometimes out of town. In fact, he was out of town for two weeks after the babies came home from the hospital. Veene was still recovering from a caesarian section. One day, she found that she was completely out of food. "I had no choice. I loaded all three into the pram. I had to carry the pram one flight of steps to the lift landing, and up again after I had been to the store. I felt pain and it was scary. After that episode, I told myself, never again."

The triplets' godmother, Sally, drops by once a week to lend a hand. Sally is a mother of eight-year-old twins herself. Haneef, Veene's oldest child, is four years old. "He's an angel," she says. Haneef feeds and showers himself every day. He also plays by himself quietly while Veene is busy with his siblings.

Ricardo and Veene don't have trouble telling the triplets apart. Neyna, the girl, is a placid and contented baby. The other two, on the other hand, have been nicknamed the Riot Brothers. They demand lots of attention. Rashad, the youngest and the smallest of the three, has the healthiest lungs and makes sure everyone knows it. Veene finds herself plugging her ears as he screams at an ear-splitting pitch.

"Yes, we've found ourselves feeding the same baby twice or forgetting to change one of them, but it's not because we've confused them. It's more because we're so exhausted and sleep deprived!" laughs Veene. "You know, I'm mostly a sweet-tempered person, but these babies have been known to bring out the witch in me!"

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