

MOST Statement on Media Exposure and Multiple Births

Objective of this Statement

Multiple births, especially higher-order multiples (triplets or more), can generate considerable public interest. Newspapers, blogs, television programs, magazines and other forms of media frequently feature stories about families who are expecting, welcoming or parenting multiples, and many of these stories offer wonderful glimpses into the unique lives of these special families. Because media projects involving children can have unintended or even negative consequences, MOST produced this policy statement with the hope that media professionals will appreciate the needs of multiple birth families, families can make informed choices about working with the media, and the best interest of the children will remain a primary focus for everyone.

Media Exposure Impact on Multiple Birth Families

All parents are proud of their children and eager to share stories and photos of their pride and joy with family, friends and other people in their lives. Parents of multiples are no exception, but because their situation is less common and likely to garner more attention from the general public than most births, some parents may feel intrigued or even flattered by a higher-level of interest by the media. Some parents feel they might want, or even need, media exposure to help find resources (volunteers, financial help, or donated items) to manage this especially demanding parenting situation. Without question, most families of higher-order multiples face at least a few, and often many, un-

usual challenges including: years of infertility or an unexpected conception, a very high-risk and frequently complicated pregnancy, the birth of multiple preterm infants, and of course the logistics of caring for and financing the needs of three, four, five, six or more small babies.

While most media projects involving multiple births are done appropriately and with consideration for the children and parents, many MOST families have expressed frustration when media stories about them exaggerate the negative aspects of multiples, present an overly positive picture ignoring the realities and risks of multiples, or simply exploit the family to advance an agenda. In addition, stories about multiples, even those that are well-done, seem especially prone to containing inaccuracies in the statistics quoted or information about fertility treatments and zygosity. These errors contribute greatly to the myths and misconceptions about multiples that are so prevalent and problematic for families trying to care lovingly for these children. *(See resources section on next page for links to quality statistics MOST makes available to media professionals.)*

Unlike individuals who pursue high-profile professional careers, most multiple birth families are not media savvy. In most cases, they are not looking for this attention. Media professionals should understand that these families have more demands on their time and energy than most and already face the inherent difficulty of trying to create an environment that is as normal as possible for their children even without the added challenge of public exposure. Parents of multiples often find

Resources

For Media Professionals:

- [UNICEF's The Media and Children's Rights Handbook](#)
- [Resources on Multiple Births for Media Professionals](#)
- [MOST Website Terms of Use](#)
- [Multiples in the News](#)

For Multiple Birth Families:

- [Multiples in the Public Domain article](#)
- [MOST's FAQs on Questions from Friends, Family and the Public](#)
- [Public Attention Cards for Families of Multiples](#)
- [Multiples in the News](#)
- [Multiple Birth Media Opportunities page](#)

Since each state may have specific laws, regulations or guidelines, MOST is providing the additional links below for families considering media projects that involved paid appearances by their children:

- [Child Labor Coalition](#)
- [US Department of Labor](#)

themselves in the media spotlight at an exceptionally vulnerable time: right after delivery, while the babies are in the NICU, and during the first year when the mother is at greater risk for post partum depression and other possible complications of a high risk pregnancy. Some hospital public relations departments may encourage families to do a press conference, which can lead to additional demands by the press.

Similarly, parents of multiples must be aware that they cannot predict the outcome of their pregnancy, the progress of their infants after birth, or the challenges they will face as a family over time. All parties should appreciate that the potential impact of having an audience closely following the intimate details of a family's life, including the ups and inevitably the downs, may not be clear until years later.

Benefits and Risks of Media Participation

Media projects involving multiples have both benefits and risks. When considering a media opportunity, both the family and the media professionals should agree that the opportunity is a good fit for that family. Whether the outcome is positive or negative will likely depend on a number of details that are unique to each family and situation. Below are the factors MOST has identified as key considerations when assessing media opportunities:

Benefits

- Positive media coverage can help build support for families of multiples and the programs that serve them, such as the delivery hospital, NICU facility, multiple birth parent support group, nurses and doctors, Early Intervention programs, etc.
- Participating in media projects can be fun and a great opportunity to thank the friends, family members, health care team and other supportive individuals who have helped!
- A successful interview can celebrate the family's triumphs and show how even families of multiples can thrive despite the added demands of having many children the same age.
- Media productions can become cherished keepsakes and preserve precious memories.
- The family's story can inspire other families of multiples who may need help or want to network with other families.

- Media stories can bring important multiple birth advocacy issues to the attention of policymakers, professionals, and the public.
- As a result of the public exposure, a family in need may be able to get help from their community or the public at-large.

Risks

- Media exposure means a parent's employers, potential employers, co-workers, friends, extended family members, the children's teachers, and others may find out about any problems the family has or services they receive.
- Information may not be presented as expected, and families may or may not have a chance to review the final version in advance.
- Not all families have the happy healthy outcome they were hoping for and may not want the added pressure of media exposure during this difficult time.
- Allowing infants to be photographed or videotaped while in the NICU can be disruptive to tiny babies as well as other families who are fac-

ing their own heartbreaking journey of having a baby in the NICU.

- Multiples may be glamorized or stigmatized in media stories. As a result, the family may receive negative comments or, in extreme cases, threats.
- Stories may contain errors or be misleading creating more stress on the family.
- The family may be strongly criticized if a story contains a request for help.
- The media may uncover and report embarrassing or damaging private details about the family's life.
- Older children may be teased by classmates at school or by friends who hear about the interview.
- Participants may be asked to comment on other high-profile stories about multiples leading to more negative exposure than parents may have anticipated.
- The ease in which today's media can be archived, searched, and reused means that stories could resurface at any time in the future leading to inconvenient or even problematic consequences. This may be true especially for pre-teen and teen multiples whose lives and personal challenges were closely documented by the media as young children.
- The children may be physically or emotionally harmed by unstable fans, threats from the public, or safety issues that result from being followed by paparazzi.
- Long-term and extremely intimate exposure can result in the family facing some of the same hazards that befall celebrities. These dangers could inadvertently sacrifice the precious family they worked so hard to build.



Letter Published in *Time Magazine* from the Surviving Dionne Quintuplets to the McCaughey Family after the Birth of their Septuplets in 1997:

If we emerge momentarily from the privacy we have sought all our adult lives, it is only to send a message to the McCaughey family. We three would like you to know we feel a natural affinity and tenderness for your children. We hope your children receive more respect than we did. Their fate should be no different from that of other children. Multiple births should not be confused with entertainment, nor should they be an opportunity to sell products.

Our lives have been ruined by the exploitation we suffered at the hands of the government of Ontario, our place of birth. We were displayed as a curiosity three times a day for millions of tourists. To this day we receive letters from all over the world. To all those who have expressed their support in light of the abuse we have endured, we say thank you. And to those who would seek to exploit the growing fame of these children, we say beware.

We sincerely hope a lesson will be learned from examining how our lives were forever altered by our childhood experience. If this letter changes the course of events for these newborns, then perhaps our lives will have served a higher purpose.

Sincerely,
Annette, Cecile and Yvonne Dionne
12/01/1997

MOST's Recommendations

MOST's [Supertwins Bill of Rights](#) states that multiple birth families have the right, "to expect privacy will be respected by the public as well as by professionals in healthcare and education." We feel this expectation also applies to media exposure. Families of multiples should be allowed to maintain an appropriate level of privacy for their children to grow and thrive. To help, we suggest that families:

- **Set limits** - Some families may decide they don't want any media exposure; some may feel very comfortable with it. Whatever direction is chosen, parents and professionals should keep the children's needs a high priority. There are as many good reasons not to participate as there are to participate. Families shouldn't feel pressured to do something they are not comfortable doing.
- **Make a plan** - If the family does decide to work with the media, parents should decide in advance what they are willing and not willing to talk about. It is their right to decline to answer any question. They may want to inquire about the project's angle. Knowing the purpose, content and direction of the story can help parents make informed decisions about whether to participate. They should remember to maintain their composure! Nothing said can be assumed to be "off the record" until all media professionals have completed their work, turned off their equipment and left the interview.
- **Advocate for the babies** - This is especially important for infants who may still be fragile from a preterm birth, are more susceptible to illness or who are not fully vaccinated. Keep in mind that most multiple birth families need to maintain a routine to function well, and face significant logistical challenges. If children need an accommodation, don't be afraid to ask for it, and if it's not an option, the family should give serious consideration to the sacrifices

they are willing to make to participate. Always be present for the children and make sure the media professional is being sensitive to their unique needs. Some families appoint a media spokesperson, such as a well-spoken family member, friend, lawyer, doctor, etc., to talk to the media on their behalf.

- **Be prepared for a negative experience** - Not all projects go as planned. Families and professionals may go into a project with different expectations. Should the story not turn out well, parents should have a plan for how they will get the support they need from individuals and groups who are not judgmental and who understand so they can continue caring for their family.
- **Consider timing** - Parents may want to wait until the babies are deemed in stable condition and the mother has had time to recover after delivery before doing a press conference. Hospitals have staff members in their public relations department who might be able to help parents navigate this process, so don't be afraid to ask for help. Hospitals can reroute calls to a hospital representative, if needed, to answer media questions or field opportunities. Just remember that the public relations department works for the hospital and not the family. Most are very aware of the need to protect and advocate for the family, but their first objective is to work in the best interest of the hospital. After discharge, consider the children's current health status, sleep schedule and developmental phase before agreeing to complex commitments. Also, families who are in the middle of a crisis or juggling challenges may want to postpone participating in media opportunities until their situation has stabilized.
- **Explore motives and expectations** - Almost all multiple birth families agree to work with the

media for positive reasons, at least initially; however, we are all human. Media attention can be very flattering and in some cases financially tempting as well. Those motives are understandable. Just remember that like most choices in life, media exposure can have wonderful benefits, but will likely require trade-offs that are easy to downplay or ignore at first. Parents should keep in mind that only a very small number of multiple birth families have garnered life-altering fame or financial rewards from their participation with the media, so it is important to have other motivations such as those listed in the benefits above. Parents should focus their priorities on both the current and long-term best interests of their children to temper expectations, filter motives and increase the odds of having a positive and fulfilling media experience.



MOST (Mothers of Supertwins), a community of families, volunteers and professionals founded in 1987, is the leading national nonprofit provider of support, education and research on higher-order multiple births.

MOST's mission is to advocate for quality prenatal care, promote healthy deliveries, and supply information to all multiple birth families in order to support successful parenting through every phase of their children's development.

[Read other MOST policy statements](#)