



One Plus One is Greater Than Two

The first time we walked our daughter, K through the brightly painted gates of St. Catherine's at Essex Crescent, our hearts were a tangled knot of pride and anxiety. She was a delicate and shy pioneer, her small hands clutching ours, embarking on a new journey into the vast and unknown world. We watched her disappear into her classroom, with some apprehension at first, but we saw her grow and adapt gradually, and she has thoroughly enjoyed school life ever since. As a trio—my wife, myself, and our firstborn—we navigated the journey of parenting our one, precious child for the first time.

A few years later, the scene repeated itself, yet the script was entirely flipped on its head. This

time, it was our younger daughter, C, whose hands we held. The gates were the same, the cheerful greetings from the teachers were familiar, but the little girl beside us was not a timid pioneer. She was a brave explorer, marching into the very same school that her sister just graduated from. The canvas of this new beginning was not the quiet uncertainty of the unknown, but the comforting, yet sometimes loud environs of a place that she was already familiar with—throughout the past few years. C had the opportunity to visit St. Catherine's many times, walking her older sister to school. Indeed, in reversed roles, K walked C back to school on her first day too, which contributed to her confidence and self-assurance.



The transition from a family of three to a family of four was a significant turn of events. When we only had one child, parenting felt like a well-synched marching band. Our attention was like a laser beam with a singular focus, her needs and milestones the central plot of our days. The arrival of C shattered that delicate equilibrium. Suddenly, everything became much less controlled. The marching band gave way to a slightly chaotic symphony where everyone was playing a different tune.

Of course there were challenges. We were forced to become masters of prioritisation and teamwork. Everything could happen at once - a hungry newborn's cry would duel with a four-year-old's urgent need to paint together; coaxing a baby to

sleep would coincide with storytelling time with a toddler. The guilt and self-doubt were frequent, were we neglecting the elder, or the younger? Were our expectations unreasonable? Do we even know what we are doing?

Yet, just as the challenges threatened to overwhelm us, we also grew to realise the true equation of our family life: one plus one is, unequivocally, greater than two. The first time that C was held by her sister; the first time she giggled because of her sister; the first time she learnt something from her sister; the first time they fought... We weren't just raising two separate children; we were cultivating a relationship. Witnessing their bonding has been one of the greatest privileges of our lives. As years have passed, they are now able to



play with dolls, build a secret world, and share jokes together. The elder daughter learns about patience and empathy when her little sister inadvertently ruins her Lego tower; the younger daughter learns about communication skills (not to mention lots of vocabulary) and negotiation tactics when playing with her older sister. We also realised that we were no longer just parents; we were also referees, logistics specialists, and emotional first-aid responders. Of course, the façade of peace can break down in the blink of an eye, where the rights to use “the” single red crayon, or the choice of a particular chair can become the flashpoint for conflict. Through relentlessly challenging one another, they are pushing each other to become better, and to conquer their own fears.

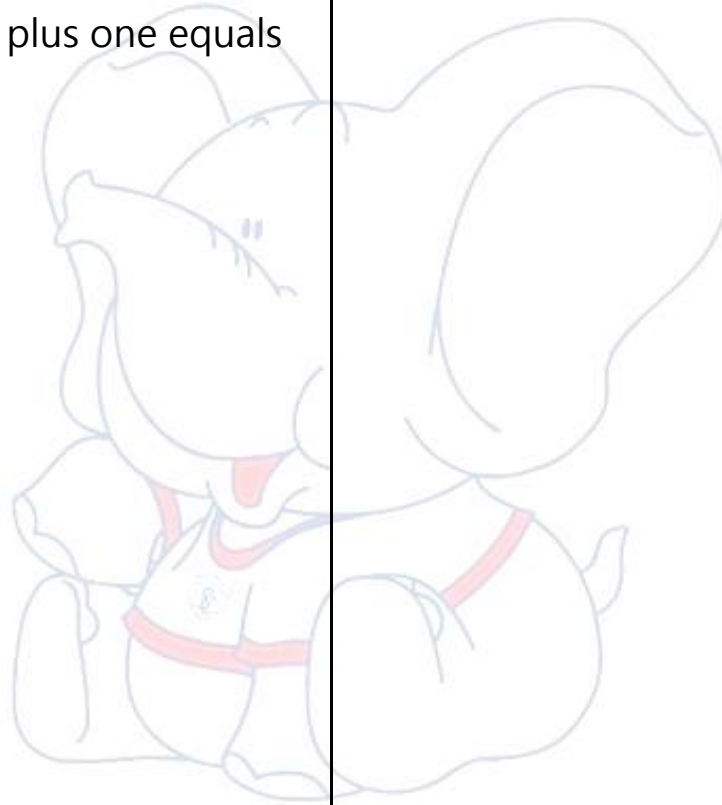
Paradoxically, they are both each other's most ardent cheerleaders and most brutal critics, a dynamic that forges character and social intelligence at a breathtaking pace. They are learning to share, to negotiate, to forgive, and to stand up for themselves, all within the safe confines of their siblinghood.

Walking through those kindergarten gates now, we understand. The math was never simple arithmetic. One child brought us the joy of firsts—first steps, first words, the discovery of a love we never knew we were capable of. Adding a second child isn't just doubling the joy but squaring it! It's in the sight of them, heads bent together over a picture book; the sound of them giggling throughout the flat; the



feel of them hugging you tightly before bed...

We started with 'one' , a perfect, whole number. But by adding a second, we didn' t just get another 'one' , we ended up creating a new universe. And in that universe, one plus one equals everything.



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