

BUILT-IN BESTIES

Siblings shape students' experiences at Paly academically and socially, for better or worse

High school is intimidating for many incoming freshmen. Constantly surrounded by new people and activities, the transition from middle school can be daunting, but can be smoother if you have a "built-in bestie." Many students at Paly have siblings attending high school at the same time, affecting their experience in a variety of different ways.

Siblings can help guide each other through school-related activities, classes and social situations. In school-related activities younger siblings participate in, older siblings can lead them through with informed advice and tips. Older siblings may have taken the first steps alone and have the opportunity to guide their siblings.

The dynamics between differently aged siblings and twins can contribute to the Paly experience, not only impacting a student academically but also socially.

When freshman Cole Kristofferson entered Paly, he was completely new to the programs offered on campus. Luckily, his older sister junior Lucy Kristofferson acted as a helping hand and was there to guide him.

"I wouldn't have done TEAM or SJP without my sister," Cole said.

TEAM and SJP are both smaller community programs on the Paly campus where students share classes, TEAM being ninth-grade specific. While Lucy has helped expose Cole to different programs on campus, he found that many expected him to have the same skills and interests as his older sister.

"Some of my teachers expected that I would write good essays since they had my sister but that's not true," Cole said.

"Most of the teachers expect a lot from me because my sister was mad educational. But I'm not educational so they hold me to a higher standard."

Siblings can act as both a guidebook to confusing new systems and, in some cases, a mentor for each other. Lucy notes a way she can assist her brother's experience in school.

"It's really nice because I know a lot of his teachers so I can go [to them] and ask how Cole is doing," Lucy said.

Having a sibling in the same environment as you can be challenging. This is amplified in a school setting where pressure and encouragement from external forces can shape someone's experience. Sophomore Isabela Grodnitzky and her twin Lucas Grodnitzky share a friendly yet challenging rivalry that pushes both of them to work harder.

"[I feel a sense of competition] all the time," Isabela said. "But not because of our parents pressuring us. Our parents don't like it when we compare ourselves.

We like to be competitive. We'll say, 'Oh, I got a better grade in this or I did this run much faster or something like that.'"

Along with friendly competition between one another, people who do not know them well may group siblings or mold them into a false stereotype.

"People think me and my brother have the same personality even though we definitely don't," Isabela said. "I'm more academic, and he's more sporty in a way. Because we don't look alike, people don't say we're similar,"

This sense of misunderstanding is especially prevalent in

twins and siblings of a similar age. Seniors Matteo Lisi and Lorenzo Lisi expand on the cause behind their differences.

"We both have very different interests in music and in what we like in general," Lorenzo said. "That is a product of just how we were raised. We were not raised [completely] together, we were always given different clothes, we were given this space to explore the world on our own."

From the perspective of a twin, there are several plausible advantages to having an older sibling. For many younger siblings, the changes they experience in high school are alleviated by their sibling who has already witnessed the same environment.

"Having an older sibling would definitely be very helpful because they've been through it all," Lorenzo said. "But when you're both going through the school process at the same time, it can be just as challenging having a twin versus being alone."

Freshman twins Courtney Taylor and Cassidy Taylor looked to their older sister Sophomore Savannah Taylor for guidance regarding Paly culture.

"I wouldn't have known how big people go for spirit week, especially on the green day where we all dress up," Cassidy said.

Transitioning to Paly can also enhance the connection between siblings. Going to the same school sometimes creates a common space to interact and discuss.

"Going to the same school as my siblings has made our bond stronger and put us all closer together," Courtney said. "Last year, me and Cassidy were in 8th grade while Savannah was in high school. Our grade difference was a space that's now filled because we now all attend the same school and we've built a closer relationship."

Extracurriculars and sports are a crucial part of student life at Paly. Friendly sibling dynamics can be tough to maintain when they're combined with the ambitious nature of sports.

"[Matteo] started playing [volleyball] before I did, and then later I became interested in playing," Lorenzo said. "We're pretty competitive with each other, I think of it as tough love. That keeps me on my feet. We both play different positions though, so it's not as competitive as it would be if we are both playing the same position."

Sometimes siblings end up playing the same sports or

participating in the same programs due to convenience and comradery.

"[My experience in doing a sport with Cassidy] was definitely positive," Courtney said. "We have a really strong bond and doing a sport just made it stronger. And now, even though we are doing different sports, I always try to come to her meets, and just try to be supportive."

Amidst the divide that can arise between siblings, Junior Katie Spitzer and Sophomore Jack Spitzer use their common sport as a way to stay connected.

"We both have pretty separate social lives at Paly, but we both do water polo and swimming, so in that way, that's how we influence each other," Katie said. "I think it [our experience doing the same sport] is positive because it's fun to have a supporter and just be able to share similar experiences."

On the other hand, inherently competitive people can exhibit unhealthy behavior when they're faced with sibling rivalry. Competition can manifest in sports, academics and social life.

"I think that [the competitiveness] hasn't done very much," Lorenzo said. "With this competitive atmosphere, it's just another drop in the bucket to what we already have [at Paly]. It's another drop in the bucket to the Bay Area competitiveness that everyone experiences."

Siblings grow up together and spend their entire childhood together. Their

experiences in high school often brings their relationship to a deeper level as they explore their differences and similarities. All kinds of relationships are bound to face challenges, but through those struggles, they grow.

"I'm happy to have a twin," Lorenzo said. "Even though it's competitive at times, we want to be the best we can be. I feel very happy for him. I feel more happy for him than I would feel for my peers and we're all rooting for each other in the family."

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courtney, 9

cassidy, 9

lucy, 11



cole, 9



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