

Where am I? Understanding Birth Order

Here are some observations about birth order. They are based on the work of a chap called Alfred Adler. They may, or may not, help us make more sense of what goes on between us and our children. The most important thing to remember is that life is understood by more than simply the place of the child in the family. It is how the individual sees their place in the family order that matters most; it's the psychological position that is most important.

Only Child

Not surprisingly the only child can have a sense of themselves as special – they are the focus of so much attention. Possible attributes and beliefs can include;

Ability to relate well to younger and older people – but less so with their peers; be highly creative; apprehensive/timid; loneliness; compliant; self-reliant and mature.



First Born/Oldest Child

It's worth remembering that for at least a short while they were the only child. They had all the interest and excitement of the parents as they discovered how to take care of a new baby. And then another child came along!

They can tend to be the bossy one; they have a tendency to leadership and take responsibility for others; they may have a sense of being 'knocked off the throne'. (This means I may have a good sense of what authority means and the importance of how things should be done).

They can also be the one who others are often disappointed with. 'You should know better', so feeling guilty may be familiar. They are generally self-reliant but this can be associated with a sense of not belonging. The oldest may also have a sense that life is a fairly serious business.

For both the Only and First Born Child we can support them by encouraging enjoyment and spontaneity. We can intentionally take responsibility from them at times and be clear with them when they do not have to be in charge. Be aware of how we are critical of what they do and check the extent to which we freely give nurturing contact, eg. hugs. Be wary of taking their obvious independence for granted!

Second Born Child

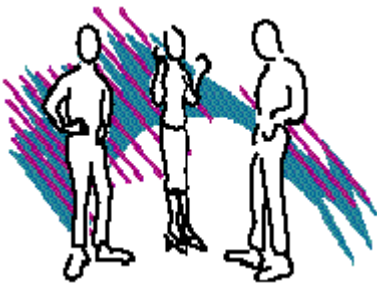
The second child never quite gets the attention that the first child enjoyed. So, from the earliest days the second child works hard to find ways of getting recognition – they are always trying to catch up. Whilst they don't



quite get the sense of responsibility they feel a keen sense of competition – which is a real no-go area for the oldest child.

They can be wary of trusting too much and may decide that the effective way of getting recognition is to be quite the opposite of the first sibling. Perhaps not surprisingly their competitiveness can carve out a sense of themselves as revolutionary, with all of the associated rebelliousness.

Middle Child



The middle child can have a sense of being squeezed between the older and young children. In large families there may be more than one middle child. They may struggle in getting a sense of who they really are but compensate for this by being able to get along with all kinds of people.

Often cited as difficult, they may have decided that the only remaining way of getting attention is through generating problems. They learn that they need to grow up fast. They may have a sense that they're invisible within the family and have a keen sense of injustice; 'It's not fair!'

To support the second born and middle child it can be helpful to recognise their efforts and provide them with attention for success and individuality. They'll be quick to pick up on being let down so it's important to deliver on promises. Resist talking about the middle child syndrome – it's sure way of creating one!

Youngest Child

Often the youngest is accustomed to having things done for them. They can tend to have an optimistic view on life and a sense that the world revolves around them. Having developed advanced levels of seduction they can be charming and resourceful in getting along with others. Whilst some may give up in trying to out do their older siblings others carefully choose areas where they can be more skillful.



For some being the youngest child can mean not being taken seriously and having others do things for you, whether requested or not. Hand-me-downs are common currency which links to a tendency for the youngest not to feel special. The youngest can whine, tell tales, be the centre of 'spoiling' and struggle to grow up.

To support the youngest child, parents can encourage them to think for themselves, ask for what they want and spot the qualities and expertise that are unique to them. It can also be important to discourage older siblings from taking over the care of their little brother or sister.