

Birth Order

Recently, I was speaking with two friends and we discovered through our conversation that we are all the babies in our families. We all laughed as we agreed that is not at all a bad position to be born into. When you consider that we are grown women with families of our own, and yet still consider ourselves the babies of our childhood families, you realize that birth order affects us well beyond the childhood years. Though no birth order expert, even an amateur like myself can make some observations.

When you are the baby in the family, you grow up used to people thinking the things you do are cute—even when you make mistakes. Consequently, we tend not to be very hard on ourselves. Contrast that with first borns and/or only children. I can do that easily, since my husband is an only child. When he makes a mistake or does not perform at his peak, he is extremely hard on himself. When I fail at something, I shrug it off and vow to do better the next time.

I used to wonder how our children could possibly be so different, after all they have the same parents, were raised right along side each other, etc. But by considering how their birth order plays into it, I can better understand their personality differences.

First borns are generally very responsible and mature. Most experts say those traits stay with the child for a lifetime. My theory on this is because we parents have absolutely no idea what we are doing with our first-born children. We tend to relate to them on more of an adult level, since they are the first children to come along. When our first son was only thirteen months old, we had our second child (insanity check, please). We thought “our oldest” was old enough to understand that he was now a big brother. We actually talked to a thirteen month old and told him about his new responsibilities. Unbelievable! Of course since he was our first-born, we tried to do everything by the book. Consequently, he is now thirteen going on thirty. I find myself reminding him that he is still a child and having to explain why he cannot vote or drive—both things he feels fully qualified to do.

The experts often say the middle child is the peacemaker—or the peacekeeper. That is certainly true with our second child—and to a large degree to our third child as well.

Then there is the baby of the family. Our fourth and final child is funny, and enjoys making the rest of us laugh. He can also throw quite a fit when he doesn't get what he wants. He was early learning things like speaking (practically since birth), scooter riding (at two years old), and bike riding (at

age four). I think he learned these things early on because he could see the value in doing them by watching his older siblings. Other things he took his time learning—tying his shoes, for example. Why go to all that trouble learning, when there were so many able bodied people around who are happy to do it for you? He also was in no hurry when it came to trying vegetables or almost any new food that threatened to be healthy. He is an individual on that score and does not mind being different in the picky—eating department.

Researching and studying about birth order is a fun and worthwhile endeavor. I recently re-read Kevin Leman's "The Birth Order Book." Pick it up at the library and get ready to learn some interesting things about yourself, your spouse and your children. Leman's book offers great insight into how our birth order in our family greatly affects our personality. Some things might surprise or perhaps irritate you a little bit—like his case about how all-only children or first borns have many perfectionist traits—but you will definitely enjoy the read. After reading his book—the second time for me, I began analyzing my own family extensively. As Leman points out, studying about your birth order is helpful in gaining a better understanding of who we are and why. A great summer read!