

what your birth order means

You lived under one roof, shared the same meals, probably fought over the same toys—so why did you and your siblings all grow up to be so different? Part of the answer may lie in your birth order. Whether you're the oldest or the youngest, in the middle or an only child, when you were born indicates much more than your age. Birth order can help reveal not only facets of your personality, but also your potentially ideal career and your most compatible love match.

Keep in mind, though, that birth order isn't as simple as first, middle and last. When more than five years separates siblings, for example, the younger child is set apart from the rest, and she may display firstborn characteristics. Sex is also a factor. The oldest daughter, for example, will often act like a firstborn even if she has an older brother. Or a middle girl may be the "baby" of the family if all the other kids are boys. Birth order isn't destiny—but it can help explain why we are the way we are.

first in line
"Firstborns tend to be reliable, serious high achievers and perfectionists," says Kevin Leman, Ph.D., a psychologist and author of *The Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way*

WHERE YOU FALL IN YOUR FAMILY AFFECTS YOUR JOB, PERSONALITY, EVEN LOVE LIFE

BY ALICIA RODRIGUEZ critical

You Are (Dell, 1985). Since oldest children have only their parents as role models, they may adopt "adult" characteristics early in life.

As babies, everything that firstborns do, from their first step to their first word, is usually a big deal. This constant attention and reinforcement of the message that they're important is what makes many firstborns so self-confident later in life. Firstborns are also often natural leaders—52 percent of American presidents have been firstborns—which stems from having younger siblings to protect and push around. Some firstborns may internalize high parental expectations and end up becoming very demanding of themselves.

Only-children share many of the characteristics of firstborns—but have them to an even greater degree, according to Dr. Leman. The reason: Only-children receive more attention. Consequently, only-kids are often a step ahead, talking sooner and reading earlier than their peers. As adults, they tend to be confident and successful, though, like firstborns, sometimes too

and perfectionistic.

Firstborns and only-children are likely to end up in high-achievement careers like medicine, law and science, according to Dr. Leman. Since they often admire order and precision, they can make great architects and accountants.

stuck in the middle

"Middle children tend to be loyal and good team players, yet they're also very independent. They're the most likely to be the mavericks in a family and the most difficult to define," says Dr. Leman. "They may be the exact opposite of their next older sibling in an effort to

3rd Independent middle child (and second youngest brother) William

2nd Diplomatic middle child (and second oldest brother) Daniel

1st Confident oldest brother Alec



The Baldwins

3rd Outgoing baby brother Stephen

distinguish themselves from their brother or sister."

As kids, middleborns often get lost in the shuffle between the exalted firstborn and the doted-on baby. Most middle kids react by seeking accep-

ance elsewhere, which is why they may have lots of friends outside the family.

Because of their in-between position, many middleborns grow up to be excellent negotiators—they prefer compromise to conflict—so they shine in jobs like business-management positions. And, since middle kids can be independent, they're also the most likely to become entrepreneurs, according to Dr. Leman.

oh baby!

"Lastborns usually love the limelight, and they're outgoing and affectionate. They're the entertainers of the world," says Dr. Leman. And, because lastborns grow up constantly hearing how cute they are, they often learn to use their charm skillfully to get what they want.

Lastborns are affectionate because they received so much love themselves. Since lastborns are often treated like babies no mat-

ter how old they become, they also

tend to act like them—even as adults. That's why lastborns are the most likely to be a little irresponsible—forgetting to balance their checkbooks, for example, or showing up late for appointments.

Because of their social savvy, lastborns are perfect for careers like counseling or teaching, says Dr. Leman. They're also good salespeople and are the most likely to become comedians.

BIRTH ORDER AND LOVE

Relationships in which partners share the same birth order are usually rockier than mixed birth-order matches, according to Dr. Leman. In other words, two driven firstborns (or onlies) may lock horns, and two middle kids—both conflict avoiders—could be a couple that ignores problems instead of dealing with them. And "two lastborns might have a lot of fun," says Dr. Leman, "but they'll both tend to shirk responsibility, which could lead to trouble." Of course, this doesn't mean that your relationship is doomed if you and your guy are both middles, for example. But understanding your birth order could help you identify areas of possible future conflict.



FactSheet

Extension

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Family and Consumer Sciences

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Birth Order

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Birth order is one way to gain an understanding of friends, family members and co-workers. Some researchers believe how you are placed in your family can have an influence on personality traits. Other factors must also be considered. These include genetics and the environment in which you were raised.

There are no magical formulas to help us understand our friends and family. However birth order research may offer "clues" about why people tend to be the way they are. Through your position in the family (birth order) you develop your behavior pattern, way of thinking and emotional response. Your birth order helps determine your expectations, your strategies for dealing with people and your weaknesses.

Understanding birth order may give some insight into a better understanding of yourself and others. Birth order placement may help you know what to expect of others, what to avoid and how to get responses you want. This can be an advantage in parenting, teaching, sales and other occupations.

Psychologists who have studied the impact of birth order on personality have found firstborns tend to be highly motivated to achieve. Of the first twenty-three astronauts sent into outer space, twenty-one were first-borns or only children.

In school, first-borns tend to work harder for grades than do later-borns. They often grow to be more competitive and to have higher educational and career aspirations. Any enumeration of prominent people, eminent scholars, even presidents of the United States contains a high percent of first-borns.

Characteristics of first borns:

- Goal setters
- High achievers
- Perfectionist
- Responsible
- Organized

- Rule Keepers
- Determined
- Detail people

Only-children are considered as a specialized type of first-borns. They are generally characterized much the same as firstborns who have siblings.

A good description of middle children is balanced. Middle children are good mediators and have superior cooperation skills. They don't have their parents all to themselves or get their own way. Therefore, they learn to negotiate and compromise. Middle children often make excellent managers and leaders because of these skills.

Characteristics of the Middle Child:

- Flexible
- Diplomatic
- Peacemaker
- Generous
- Social
- Competitive

Youngest children in the family are typically outgoing and great at motivating other people. They are also affectionate, uncomplicated and sometimes a little absent minded.

Studies show that babies of the family gravitate toward vocations that are people oriented. Good sales people are often last borns.

Characteristics of the last born child:

- Risk takers
- Outgoing
- Idea people
- Creative
- Humor
- Question authority

Birth order isn't a simplistic 1-2-3 system that says all first-borns are equally one way, all second children are another and last-born kids are always just like this or that. These are tendencies and general characteristics that often apply. There are dynamics within families that can change relationships.

Variables can affect each family situation. These variables include spacing (the number of years between children), the sex of the child, physical differences, disabilities, the birth order position of parents, any blending of two or more families due to death or divorce and the relationship between parents.

Whether raising your children or working with adults the key is to remember everyone is an individual. Birth order is another attempt to gain insight into the complex behavior of human beings.

Sources: *The Birth Order Challenge*, by Clifford Isaacson; *The Birth Order Book* by Kevin Lehman
