



HOW BIRTH ORDER KNOWLEDGE HELPS PARENTS

Many parents struggle to make sense of the differences between their children. Same parents, same parenting, same school but completely different interests, strengths, and personalities. So, what's the difference? The solution can be found in the birth position of each child and understanding how it impacts on how they are raised and their relationship with other family members.

Defining children by their position

Parents tend to define their children according to their family positions. 'He's my eldest' or 'She is the baby of the family' are descriptors that many parents are familiar with. Expectations generally match those defining descriptions.

Just as relevant is how children see themselves in relation to their siblings. Eldest children are only children for a time, which is a treasured position that comes with perks, privileges, and parental anxiety. A second child means dethronement, so the child born first will generally spend a great deal of energy keeping their sibling in their place. And so, the sibling dance begins. You now need family leadership skills to compliment the child-rearing skills you've developed that previously focused on raising one child.

Learning that one approach doesn't suit every child

Many parents discover that the techniques that were so successful with the first child can have the opposite effect another child. Parents who successfully develop independence and self-sufficiency in their eldest child scratch their heads as their youngest child turns dependency into an artform. Children often use their position to get their needs met. Many youngest children become expert at using charm and childishness to manipulate their siblings, while older children may push themselves to get approval from their parents.

Seconds and middle children often experience less time alone with their parents, which may be why this group are more likely to look outside their family for a sense of belonging. They generally have wider friendship circles than first borns and are usually the first child to leave the family nest. And first borns, just love to have their parents to themselves as that was how it used to be. Understanding these birth order differences helps parents to better manage, motivate and communicate with each child.

Motivating children

Want to motivate a child to do their best at school, tidy their bedroom or get behind a good cause? Birth order knowledge provides vital clues to help hit the best motivational button for each child. For instance, it may come as no surprise that youngest children are less concerned with gaining parental approval than their siblings. They just want to be noticed. Making a fuss over their accomplishments can do wonders for the achievement and contribution levels of this group. First borns on the other hand, usually yearn for parental approval, which if not carefully managed can cause them to take fewer learning risks.

Managing children's behaviour

First borns generally don't need a lot of discipline or behaviour management from parents. Limits, boundaries, reasoning, and consequences usually do the trick for these rule followers and conformers. But these methods probably won't work with children in other birth order positions. They've had the advantage of having an eldest sibling break their parents in and they've seen most of your management playbook already, so you need to come up with something new.

Doing the sibling shuffle

Sibling rivalry comes with the family territory. It's most intense when there are only two children in a family as it's hard to escape a single sibling. Knowing how to reduce sibling rivalry so it's healthy rather than toxic requires an understanding of birth order personalities, acceptance of individual differences and the ability to build closeness through common purpose, fun and rituals.

In closing

Birth order knowledge is fascinating, providing a rich vein of information to help you raise children to be successful, happy, and most importantly, content in their own skins. It's too important to be ignored.

Parenting Ideas 2022, accessed January 2022, <https://www.parentingideas.com.au/>

