

INSIGHTS

The perks and pitfalls of being born first



The birth of a first child is a big event. Such is the excitement and emotion that parents often don't realise that the baby that they bring home is a ground breaker, taking them headlong into every stage of development.

First-borns are born into a privileged position. Living in the spotlight, they get piles of attention and as they grow up, they are given more responsibility than other children in other positions. They lead the way, break new ground, and rule the roost if others follow. Parents expect a great deal from first-borns, so to avoid disappointing them many become low risk-takers. Parental expectation and their tendency for perfectionism and conscientiousness can make first-borns more anxiety prone than children in other birth order positions.

First-born children can be bossy, responsible, and achievement-oriented but they are more neurotic, more intense, and more inflexible than children in any other birth order position. Taking life and themselves too seriously is a problem for many first-borns. Here are some tips for parenting children and young people in this privileged but anxiety-prone position:

Encourage rather than praise or criticise

First-borns respond to encouragement as it releases the pressure on them to perform. When they know that effort, improvement, and contribution matter more to parents than good results they're more likely to take risks and stretch themselves as learners.

Save responsibilities for others

First-borns know all about responsibility, as they get more than their fair share of jobs and reminders to be good role models. Share chores, responsibilities, and expectations among all children in the family, including youngest children.

Enjoy two-on-one time

First-borns love having both parents to themselves, if applicable, as that's the way life was until a second-born came along and robbed them of their privileged position. Only children are fortunate that they don't experience the 'disgrace' of dethronement.

Embed wellbeing practices into family life

Help anxiety prone first-borns develop positive wellbeing habits including healthy eating, adequate exercise, and sleep and relaxation techniques such as mindfulness and meditation.

In Closing

The drive, leadership and attention to detail of first-borns contributes enormously to society. We need to help them lighten up and enjoy themselves as well.



Michael Grose

Michael Grose, founder of Parenting Ideas, is one of Australia's leading parenting educators. He's an award-winning speaker and the author of 12 books for parents including *Spoonfed Generation*, and the bestselling *Why First Borns Rule the World and Last Borns Want to Change It*. Michael is a former teacher with 15 years experience, and has 30 years experience in parenting education. He also holds a Master of Educational Studies from Monash University specialising in parenting education.