

INSIGHTS

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.

Michael Grose presents: Using birth order knowledge for a parenting edge

Our school has a membership with Parenting Ideas. As part of this membership, you can attend the upcoming webinar 'Using birth order knowledge for a parenting edge' at no cost.

About

In this webinar, Michael Grose explains how birth order position impacts on a child's personality, attitudes and behaviour. He provides insights to help bring out the best in every child, reduce destructive sibling rivalry and increase family harmony.

When

Wednesday 10 November 2021 8:00pm AEDT

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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.