

How does birth order shape your personality?

You've probably heard people joke about how the eldest child is the bossy one, the middle child is the peace-maker, and the youngest child is the irresponsible rebel — but is there any truth to these stereotypes?

Psychologists often look at how birth order can affect development, behavior patterns, and personality characteristics, and there is some evidence that birth order might play a role in certain aspects of personality.

What Is Adler's Birth Order Theory?

Early in the 20th century, the Austrian psychiatrist Alfred Adler introduced the idea that birth order could impact development and personality. Adler, the founder of individual psychology, was heavily influenced by psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud.

Key points of Adler's birth order theory were that firstborns were more likely to develop a strong sense of responsibility, middleborns a desire for attention, and lastborns a sense of adventure and rebellion.

First-Born Child

Adler's birth order theory suggests that firstborns get more attention and time from their parents. New parents are still learning about who to bring up children, which means that they may be more rule-oriented, strict, cautious, and sometimes even neurotic.

Firstborn children are often described as:

- Leaders
- High-achieving (or sometimes even over-achieving)
- Structured and organized
- Responsible
- Mature



All this extra attention firstborns enjoy changes abruptly when younger siblings come along. When you become an older sibling, you suddenly have to share your parent's attention. You may feel that your parents have higher expectations for you and look to you to set an example for your younger siblings.

Consider the experiences of the oldest siblings, who are frequently tasked with caring for younger siblings. Because they are often expected to help fill the role of caregivers, they may be more nurturing, responsible, and motivated to excel.

Research has found that firstborn kids tend to have more advanced cognitive development, which may also confer advantages when it comes to school readiness skills. However, it's important to remember that being the oldest child can also come with challenges, including carrying the weight of expectations and the burden of taking a caregiver role within the family.

Middle Child

Adler suggested that middle children tend to become the family's peacemaker since they often have to mediate conflicts between older and younger siblings. Because they may get less attention from their parents compared to their siblings and tend to be overshadowed by their eldest brothers and sisters, middle children may seek social attention outside of the family.

Middleborns are often described as:

- Independent
- People pleasers
- Adaptable
- Jealous
- Competitive



"Middle child syndrome" is a term often used to describe the negative effects of being a middle child. Because middle kids are sometimes overlooked, they may engage in people-pleasing behaviors as adults as a way to get the attention they desperately need. While they tend to be adaptable and independent, they can also have a rebellious streak that tends to emerge when they want to stand apart from their siblings.

Some research suggests that middle children may be more sensitive to rejection. As a middle child, you may feel like you didn't get as much attention and were constantly in competition with your siblings. You may struggle with feelings of insecurity, fear of rejection, and poor self-confidence.

Last Child

Lastborns, often referred to as the "babies" of the family, are often seen as spoiled and pampered compared to their older siblings. Because parents are more experienced at this point (and usually also much busier), they often take a more relaxed approach to parenting.

Last-born children are often described as:

- Outgoing
- Charming
- Immature
- Self-centered
- Risk-taking



Adler's theory suggests that the youngest children tend to be outgoing, sociable, and charming. And if the youngest child is female, she tends to be more coddled or cared for, leading to a greater reliance on others compared to her older siblings, especially in larger families.

Only Child

Only children are unique in that they never have to share their parents' attention and resources with a sibling. It can be very much like being a firstborn in many ways.

Only children are often described as:

- High-achieving
- Imaginative
- Mature
- Introverted
- Self-centered



Because they interact with adults so much, only children often seem very mature for their age. If you're an only child, you may feel more comfortable being alone and enjoy spending time in solitude pursuing your own creative ideas. You may like having control and, because of your parents' high expectations, have strong perfectionist tendencies.

Read the text and mark the statements T (true) or F (false):

1. Alfred Adler suggested the Birth Order Theory in the late 20th century. _____
2. The theory was influenced by psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud. _____
3. First-born children can be seen as the most responsible ones. _____
4. According to the theory, first-born children get the least amount of attention from their parents. _____
5. Middle children have more advantages when it comes to school readiness skills. _____
6. Middle children tend to be attention-seeking. _____
7. Lastborns are usually more independent than their siblings. _____
8. Younger girls are more coddled than the youngest boys. _____
9. Only children are the most extraverted ones, because they lack communication with the siblings. _____
10. Only children are more creative than those who have siblings. _____