

Family Constellation

Position	Typical Characteristics	Ways to Encourage
First Child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used to getting a lot of attention. • Usually reliable and responsible. Attempts to live up to parent's standards. • Likely to become high achiever. May need to feel right, perfect, superior, in control. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beware of high expectations. Accept child's efforts and don't expect perfection. • Focus on fun of participating, not the goal of winning. • Model and teach acceptance of mistakes as opportunities to learn.
Second Child (of two) (See also characteristics of youngest)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AVIS child - not first but always trying harder. • May develop characteristics opposite to older child (e.g., may become irresponsible and rebellious if older child is responsible and cooperative). • Is likely more flexible and friendly, less demanding of parent's attention. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refrain from comparisons with oldest. • Avoid taking sides in sibling fights. • Focus on positive behavior and contributions to prevent reinforcing negative view of self. • Encourage interests and activities that are different from the older child.
Middle Child (of three)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May feel squeezed between competent older and cute baby. May be rebellious and uncooperative. • Sensitive to things that are unfair or unjust. • Usually exhibits the strongest or weakest personality in the family. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spend special time alone with child. • Give focused attention and eye contact. • Include in planning of family activities and jobs. • Encourage child's participation in activities and skills that interest him or her.
Middle Children of Larger Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often cooperative and reliable. • Less competitive. May be good mediator and diplomat. • Does not expect extra attention or privileges. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take time for one-on-one activities and focused attention. • Help each child feel special and worthwhile. • Find opportunities for each one to contribute.
Youngest Child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often indulged by parents and older siblings. • Frequently not taken seriously – baby forever. • Enjoys playing. May be self-indulgent and irresponsible. • Knows how to be cute and charming. • May lack confidence in ability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage self-reliance. Do not do for the youngest what he or she can do alone. • Don't refer to as "The Baby." • Allow child to resolve own conflicts. Allow him or her to learn from consequences. • Give responsibility and expect contributions. • Avoid emphasis on cuteness.
Only Child (Similar to first child in many ways)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used to being the center of attention. Finds sharing difficult. • May be uncooperative if not getting own way. • May get along better with people older or younger than themselves. • May feel incompetent and unsure of self or may be perfectionistic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model and teach sharing. • Encourage cooperation by cooperative games and problem solving. • Keep your expectations age appropriate. • Provide varied opportunities for interaction with peers, (e.g., visits with friends, child care, pre-school, sleep overs, etc.).

Birth order alone does not determine lifestyle.

It is children's perceptions of how they belong in the family that affects how they function.

Beth Johnson Revised 2006/04/04 Adapted from a variety of Adlerian sources
 Permission to copy for classroom use only granted by Saskatoon Adlerian Society