

BE WELL

Lastborn: Last But Certainly Not Least

By **Debbie DeAngelo**
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Editor's note: Following is the last of a three-part series of articles on the subject of birth order by health and wellness expert Debbie DeAngelo. Her articles will continue on Monday, July 18.

Every day I'm surrounded by babies – not infants, but adults who are the lastborn of their families. My husband, sister, dance partner, and closest friends are all babies. As a stereotypical firstborn, this is both fun and frustrating.

Whether you're a pioneering first, overlooked middle, lonely only or charismatic lastborn, all places in the family zoo come with perks and perils. Even though birth order is but one of the many influences that molds a person's character, it's a powerful one. Since understanding one another makes for more harmonious relationships, let's examine what makes the lastborn tick.

Personality

Walk into any social gathering, and you can immediately spot the baby of the family. He or she is the "life of the party." Being outgoing, fun-loving and attention-seeking, most are wonderfully comfortable in the limelight.

Quite simply, babies are fun people to hang with and are immensely popular. They develop their entertaining, carefree nature early in life while trying to carve out a notch on the populated family tree. It doesn't take them long to figure out that they are living in the shadows of their siblings. Being the last one of the family to do everything, from riding a bike to being in the school play, nothing

they do is actually original – except making people laugh and being skilled at ensuring they are the center of attention.

Their desire to stand out, combined with Mom and Dad’s increasingly laissez-faire parenting style, helps them achieve center stage. According to their brothers and sisters, they “get away with murder.” Parents may be worn down by the time they get to the youngest child, so they tend to loosen up about rules, discipline, and family chores. As adorable and charming as babies are, sometimes their pursuit of attention can run amok, leaving them to be described as spoiled, rebellious and manipulative.

Career

By far, the biggest asset the baby has is his or her winning personality. Often referred to as a “people person,” babies excel at careers and hobbies in sales, entertainment, and the media. Their affinity for reading people is advantageous in these professions, too. Being a risk taker, the youngest is well suited for a job that requires creativity and innovation. Although not typically in charge, they are vital to a well-rounded team and make great think-tank members. If there’s anyone who can think outside the box and shake up the status quo, it’s the baby. They know no boundaries.

Relationships

Since babies grew up being taken care of by everyone else in the family, the desire to be looked after and cared for spills into adult relationships. Therefore, the best match for a baby is the caretaker of the family ... the firstborn. While babies bring levity and spontaneity into this partnership, they are balanced by the order and practicality of the super-motivated firstborn.

Lastborns can increase the success of personal relationships by periodically putting the needs of others first. It would be beneficial to remember that there are two people in a partnership, as well as other people in a group, and that it’s not just about them. Although easy to talk to, babies have to focus on actively listening and seeing things from others’ perspectives instead of thinking about what they are going to say next. Also, their sense of adventure and fun should be tempered by pitching in and helping with chores, decisions, and responsibilities.

Remember, one place in the birth order isn’t better, or worse, than another. It’s all about accentuating strengths and balancing weaknesses in an attempt for personal and family peace.

Even if the lastborn’s behavior can be somewhat headshaking to this firstborn, I can truly see the value babies add to my life – so I’ll keep them around.

Sources and Suggested Reading

“The New Birth Order Book,” Dr. Kevin Leman

“Born to Rebel: Birth Order, Family Dynamics, and Creative Lives,” Frank J. Sulloway

Firstborns: "The First Born Advantage," Dr. Kevin Leman; "Oldest Daughters -- What to Know if You Are One or Have Ever Been Bossed Around by One," Patricia Schudy.

Middleborns: "The Secret Power of Middle Children," Catherine Salmon, Ph.D.; "Why Can't We Get Along? Healing Adult Sibling Relationships," Peter Goldenthal, Ph.D.

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