

BE WELL

Birth Order: Stuck in the Middle

By Debbie DeAngelo
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Editor's note: Following is the second of a three-part series of articles on the subject of birth order by health and wellness expert Debbie DeAngelo. The series will continue Monday, July 4 with a look at the lastborn in the family.

Who is the most overlooked member of the family? Yep, the middleborn.

Ask any middle child, and they will cite the lack of pictures in the family photo album and their lack of recognition as proof that they got lost in the shuffle. Often, they state they were left out and ignored. They came into the family too late to be the adored firstborn and too early to be the lavished lastborn.

Despite their self-reported underwhelming position in the family, research indicates that middle kids often become the most well-adjusted adults. Let's take a look at life in middledom.

Personality

The traits of middlers are tough to nail down. Even researchers are slightly stymied by this birth order because their personality characteristics can be contradictory and all over the board. This is attributed to the fact that the middler's traits are shaped by the siblings on either side of them – particularly the one directly above them.

They look at their older sibling and usually forge a distinctly different path. However, if the middle child feels they can compete with their older sibling, they may give him or her a run for their money. The result could be role reversal. Also, if the middle child is the first son or daughter or if five or more years separate them from their siblings, they may take on the traits of a firstborn.

Most middlers report feeling out of place in the family and don't feel like they have a voice. Because they aren't the memorable firstborn or the cherished lastborn, they don't think they are special. This need to be accepted is played out in their peer group, which becomes their family. That's why researchers agree that middle kids often create a large social circle, and their friends are of the utmost importance.

Even though the traits of middlers are widespread, as a general rule, they are independent, devoted, diplomatic, rebellious, and stubborn.

Career

Most strive to keep the peace and seek balance, which serves them well in many professions. As the ultimate team player, they make great colleagues. Since they stick to their commitments, no matter what, it's necessary for them to set and maintain boundaries. Otherwise, they may find themselves being taken advantage of.

Middlers are loyal, inventive and may gravitate towards public service and education. Keen negotiation and people skills make those in the middle effective managers, entrepreneurs, and mediators. Being creative, a career in journalism, music, or advertising is also a good option.

Notable middleborns include Mark Twain, Princess Diana, Warren Buffett, Georgia O'Keeffe, Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Jefferson, John F. Kennedy, Bill Gates, Madonna, Anne Hathaway, Snoop Dog, and Madonna.

Relationships

Their powerful sense of loyalty also spills over into their intimate relationships. A number of studies show that middleborns are the most monogamous of the birth order. Possibly because they felt like they didn't belong growing up, they are extremely dedicated to the family they create. They also exhibit more acceptance of their partner.

Middle children are inclined to be go-with-the-flow types who display a high degree of agreeableness. As such, their tendency to avoid conflict and hide emotions from others can cause a communication roadblock with their partner. Emotionally, they may play it "close to the vest." Their partner would be wise to understand this trait and encourage them to share their feelings, rather than protect and hide them. That's why the best match for a middle child usually isn't another middle child. In fact, birth order literature indicates that coupling with a lastborn is a good option. With the middler's ability to compromise and the baby's outgoing personality, the odds for success are good.

Whether you arrived first, middle, or last, information regarding birth order doesn't explain or encompass all human behavior and characteristics. It also

shouldn't pigeon-hole people. It simply guides us in our understanding of what influences and molds our personality, as well as that of others.

Sources and Suggested Reading

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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