

Birth astronauts sent
into space, twenty-
one were first



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Birth Order and Personality Does being first born make people more responsible? If someone is the middle born child, is he or she going to be rebellious? If people are last born are they more likely to be on television? Are first born children inconsiderate and selfish or highly motivated? A person's birth order can affect his personality. Birth order... definitely affects your personality, your attitude, your children, your occupational choice, and even how well you get along with God (Leman, Birth Order 10).

There is an awful lot of research and plain old "law of averages" supporting the affect of birth order on personality. It doesn't explain everything about human behavior-no personality test or system can-but it does give us many clues about why people are the way they are (Leman, Birth Order 11). There are four basic classifications of birth order: the oldest, the only, the middle, and the youngest. Each has its own set of advantages, as well as its own set of disadvantages (Leman, Birth Order 10). First born children tend to be high achievers in whatever they do. Some traits customarily used to label first born children include reliable, conscientious, list maker, well organized (Leman, Birth Order 11), more oriented toward authority and responsibility (Moore and Cox 19), and tough-minded (Stephens 356). The first born child is typically the success story in the family.

They are the ones that are driven to succeed in high achievement fields such as science, medicine, and law (Leman, Birth Order 13). For example, of the first twenty-three astronauts sent into space, twenty-one were first borns or the very similar only child. In fact, all seven astronauts of the original Mercury program were first born children (Leman, Birth Order 12). Another trait that is often typical of the first born child is the tendency to choose

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careers that involve leadership. For instance, fifty-two percent of the United State's presidents have been first borns (Leman, Birth Order 44).

First borns are "first come" and they are "first served" by eager parents who want to do this job of parenting better than anyone has done before (Leman, Birth Order 42). This idea helps support research that indicates first born children walk and talk earlier than later borns. They get more coaching, prodding, and encouragement than later borns (Leman, Birth Order 40). When it comes to school work, first borns tend to have higher IQs and be more productive than their younger siblings (Brown 147). Many times the most attention is paid to the first born and along with getting the most attention, the first born gets the most work (Leman, Birth Order 46). More is expected from first borns; therefore, they often grow up faster because they are the ones setting the example for younger brothers and sisters (Leman, Birth Order 46).

Many first borns feel that since they have had to "toe the line," their siblings have it easier than they (Leman, Birth Order 45). For the most part, this is true. As each child is added to the typical family, the rules and regulations are relaxed a little more (Leman, Birth Order 45). In general too much is expected from the first born. The majority of people who seek professional counseling are first borns or only children (Leman, Birth Order 46). There are at least two good reasons first borns usually come in such down-right upright (and sometimes a little uptight) packages. Those two reasons are Mom and Dad.

Brand-new parents tend to be a paradox when it comes to their first born child. One side of them is overprotective, anxious, tentative, and inconsistent. The other side can be strict in discipline, demanding, always pushing and encouraging more and better performance (Leman, Birth Order 40). All things considered, first borns probably turn out the most “normal.” In addition to the labels mentioned before, first born children tend to be goal oriented, self-sacrificing, conservative, believers in authority and ritual, and self-reliant (Leman, Birth Order 39). First borns, in general, are people who like structure and order. They have a tendency to enter professions that are rather exacting (Leman, Birth Order 13).

First born children can be found in great numbers in positions like accountants, bookkeepers, executive secretaries, engineers, and more recently, jobs including computers (Steelman 355). Some famous first borns that have gone on to be famous leaders, TV journalists, important business leaders, respected individuals, etc. include Jimmy Carter (President), Hillary Clinton (First Lady), Peter Jennings (TV journalist), Bill Cosby (actor) (Springen 68), Steven Jobs (Apple), Albert Einstein (scientist), Sam Walton (Wal-Mart), and Ted Turner (Turner Broadcasting) (Koselka and Shook 146). In many ways, the only child is like the first born child. An only child is a first born child who never loses his parents. A perfect description of the only child would include all the labels used to describe a first born child. However, preceding each word would be the prefix super (Leman, Birth Order 51). As a special type of first born, only children tend to be highly motivated, self confident and achievement orientated (Moore and Cox 19).

Some misconceived stereotypes given to only children include spoiled, selfish, lazy, and conceited (Leman, *Growing Up* 185). Far from being any of those, only children are among the top achievers in every area of endeavor (Leman 186). For example, some of the more famous only children include Franklin D. Roosevelt (President), Leonardo da Vinci (artist) and Charles Lindbergh (pilot) (Forer 9). A common characteristic among only children is their need to satisfy others. What they say they will do, they usually do. Only children are very reliable (Leman, *Birth Order* 51). Only children have their downsides too.

Too often these downsides come from their parents. For instance, new parents tend to jump in too early to help with everything he tries. They can't sit back and let the child struggle (Leman, *Birth Order* 50). What they don't realize is that frustration is a powerful learning tool. When children fight to master a task and succeed, their faces light up with pride..." I did it myself." If a parent tends to jump in to help at every little problem, then the child loses his will to try things by themselves (Leman, *Birth Order* 51). Only children seem to be very on top of things, articulate, and mature. They appear to have it all together.

Yet so often, they feel inferior, not " up to par." Their standards have always been set by adults and are often high, sometimes too high (Leman, *Birth Order* 51). Only children tend to be critical of themselves and have a hard time enjoying their achievements (Leman, *Birth Order* 50). They feel as if they can never do anything good enough.

Even if they succeed, they often feel as though they did not succeed by enough. This is usually the start of what experts call the “discouraged perfectionist” (Sulloway 121). Many other special problems may develop with only children. These problems are often classified as only children who are “problem children.” For example, the “special jewel” or receiver child often has a problem with the heliocentric theory that states our solar system revolves around the sun. The special jewel or receiver child believes that the entire universe revolves around him (Leman, Growing Up 189). This type of child generally develops when the parents give in to the child’s every wish (Leman, Growing Up 189). It is important for this child’s parents to say no.

If the child says, “Mom, I want that!” his mother should respond by saying, “No, I will not buy that for you, but you may purchase it with the money you have earned yourself.” Once these children realize that they are dealing with someone who can’t cave into their every demand, they become quite pleasant (Leman, Growing Up 190). Sometimes only children become “friend snatchers.” The child who never learns to share his toys, will also have a problem with sharing friends as well. The friend snatcher becomes agitated when his friend tries to include other people into the pair’s activities (Leman, Growing Up 194). They may try to bribe their “friend” by offering them toys, food, maybe even money (Leman, Growing Up 195). For this problem, experts suggests confronting the child by proposing, maybe, the reason he is not having very good relationships with his friends is because the child is not willing to share friends with anyone.

Suggest that they need to try doing activities with more people and that they need to stop being so possessive (Leman, Growing Up 196). Some only
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children see themselves as the “target” child. This child also has a problem with the heliocentric theory. This child magnifies his or her importance in every situation and believes he or she is the one being singled out for unfair treatment. For example, if a teacher gives them an “F” on a grammar composition, it’s because the teacher doesn’t like the child, not because he did a poor job (Leman, *Growing Up* 197). The problems of an only child are often the result of a child who has been sheltered from society by overprotective parents.

Those who are well adjusted know from an early age that life is a mixture of good and bad. They understand that bad things simply happen once in awhile (Forer 21). Middle children are often the hardest to classify because there are so many different variables. Personality and the number of years between older and younger siblings play an important part.

In general, middle borns suffer from an identity crisis. Some typical qualities often associated with middle children include being negotiators, having the fewest pictures in the family photo album, independent, extreme loyalty to peer groups and many friends (Leman, *Birth Order* 73). Being the middle child sometimes means not getting as much attention as the oldest and youngest children do. The oldest child is important because he is the oldest. As for the youngest, he’s special because he is the baby (Leman, *Birth Order* 5). Being the middle child can also mean living in a sort of anonymous haziness. Meanwhile sometimes the middle child can get away with the occasional laziness and indifference.

Most of the time the middle child isn't pushed as hard or expected to accomplish quite as much as the firstborn. The drawback is without being pushed, they may never fulfill their full potential (Leman, Birth Order 5). The middle birth positions are often considered the most difficult, in part because middle borns may receive less individual attention from parents (Moore and Cox 20). In contrast, the middle child may fight for his parent's attention resulting in a highly competitive child (Forer 111). Lacking the benefit of the exceptions parents make for their first and last borns, the middle child may learn to negotiate, compromise, and give and take; valuable skills that will help him succeed (Forer 113). Also experts have found that because middle children have had to struggle for more things than their siblings do, they are better prepared for life (Russel 10).

Middle born children may compensate for the lack of attention provided from their parents by developing nonparental relationships (Moore and Cox 21). It's not unusual for the middle born child to hang out with their peer group more than any other child in the family (Leman, Birth Order 75). Some famous middle and second children who have found their identity include Robert Allen (AT; T), Mat Dillion (actor), Andrew Grace (Intel), Tom Selleck (actor), George Burns (comedian), Richard Nixon (President) (Koselka and Shook 146). If a group of psychologists randomly picked out ten last born children, chances are that nine of them would have these characteristics: manipulative, charming, blames others, shows off, people person, good salesperson, engaging, and sometimes spoiled (Leman, Birth Order 14). An obvious condition of his ordinal position is that he is born to parents who are well experienced in the business of child rearing (Forer 124). It seems that

the youngest children are less often subject to excessive demands from his parents for achievements. Since there is a relief of excessive pressure on the youngest child, they have been found in many cases to be more spontaneous, original and creative than children from earlier ordinal positions (Forer 124).

Just because the later borns don't receive as much pressure as other siblings, doesn't mean they don't receive as much attention. The parents many times favor a family's last born child (Moore and Cox). Later borns fare better in life because they are the only member of the family to receive parental investment undiluted by the needs of a younger rival (Sulloway 305). This is especially true in a special case that psychologists have coined as the "quasi-only" child.

This case appears when the last child in the family comes along a good five or more years after the others. He starts a whole new birth order level (Leman, Birth Order 15). Later borns are more inclined to take risks when compared with first borns. Later borns are more likely to rate themselves as "physically daring." They are more likely to engage in dangerous sports such as rugby, football, hockey, boxing, and parachute jumping.

By contrast, first borns favor swimming, tennis, golf, and other non-contact sports. The inclination to participate in dangerous sports increases with birth rank and family size (Sulloway 112). Being last born isn't all fun and games. Youngest children often have feelings of insecurity or long periods of self-doubt (Leman, Birth Order 73). For example, a youngest child grows up

being coddled one minute as a darling little baby, but the next minute he is being compared unfavorably with an older sibling (Leman, Birth Order 74).

As a result of conflicting experiences, youngest children can be extremely self-reliant in some ways and insecure in others (Leman, Birth Order 79). For the most part, youngest children learn to cope with the problems of self-doubt. In fact, youngest children often go on to become quite successful, thanks in part to their originality and determination to prove themselves to the world (Leman, Birth Order 79). Often they express their unique view of the world (Brazelton 329). People-pleasing fields such as art, comedy, entertainment, and sales are full of youngest children (Leman, Birth Order 11). Some examples of famous youngest children include Michael Jordan (basketball), David Letterman (TV host), Bill Gates (Microsoft) (Springen 68), Lee Iacocca (Chrysler), Ross Perot (Perot Systems) (Koselka and Shook 146). Birth order can affect a person's personality.

Aware of its effects or not, a person's personality and the decisions they make in life are constantly being influenced by their birth order. The personality differences among siblings are not only systematic, but also predictable (Russel 10).