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Birth order, parenting and stuttering.

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1994
https://hdl.handle.net/10539/25416

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2.6 The Middle Child.

By the time the second and subsequent children are born, the mother and father may react more consistently and with more confidence and skill in their child-rearing activities. Gesell (cited in McArthur, 1956: 52) points out that the "first baby makes the greatest demands upon the mother, both physically and psychologically. The second benefits thereby."

> "The middle child can be in an advantageous position as compared with other children in the family. His birth order does not compel development of stern authoritarianism and overly serious purpose as does that of the oldest child. He does not have to undergo domination by all other members of the family as does the youngest child" (Forer, 1969:113).

Toman (1993) gives an example of how the second and subsequent children benefit from not being the firstborn child. He reports that second and subsequent children are often stronger physically than the firstborn child. Their birth weight is greater as the "intrauterine road to life has been paved" (Toman, 1993:69).

From birth, the second born child has to share parental attention with another child. This may make them more co-operative.

The different levels of achievement between firstborns and later borns may reflect a difference in motivation to succeed, rather than in ability *per se*. This can be explained by the firstborn child needing to achieve in order to maintain a favourable position with his parents. In contrast, Adler (1932)

believes that the second born child is stimulated to catch up to the firstborn child. He maintains, therefore, that they often prove to be more talented and successful, because they exert themselves more.

Hurlock (1978) attributes the second born child with the following personality traits: independent, dependable, well adjusted, adventuresome, aggressive and funloving.

Jenson & Kingston (1986) report that middle children will often feel abused and slighted. This is because they do not have the rights of the firstborn child, nor the privileges given to the youngest child within the family. They add that the middle child may be revolutionary, rebellious and challenging. Jenson & Kingston (1986) surmise that this stems from a desire to 'overthrow' the firstborn child.

For this reason the second or middle child has often been referred to as 'the lost child' (Forer, 1969:111).

2.7 The Lastborn Child.

Very little literature pertaining to the lastborn child has been published. However, when this child enters the family, he enters a complex system of relationships between parents and siblings, and the interaction of these different systems.

Adler (1932) asserts that the youngest child may develop an inferiority complex, due to the fact that everybody around them is older and stronger. Due to this, they become inventive in trying out a whole range of tricks to help mask their feelings of incompetence (Jenson & Kingston, 1986).

A high motivation to surpass his older siblings may make the lastborn more competitive and ambitious.

As the child grows up in an environment of adults and siblings, the lastborn child is used to having to interact with a range of people, and is often popular, vivacious and extroverted (Toman, 1993; Simpson, 1985; Yahraes, 1978). In this way the lastborn child often has well developed social skills. The lastborn child is often seen as courageous and willing to take chances.

As the baby of the family there is often a tendency that the lastborn child is pampered. Due to the fact that lastborn children are often indulged and spoilt, their frustration level can be very low. The tendency is for the older children to make sacrifices for the benefits of their younger siblings, and therefore the lastborn child may never really learn how to handle pressure. They may learn to be charmers in order to attract attention through being cute, and may be skilled at manipulating others (Toman, 1993; Simpson, 1985).

Other characteristics afforded to the lastborn child are confidence, friendliness, irresponsibility, spontaneity, and a good nature (Hurlock, 1978).

Sutton-Smith and Rosenberg (1970) are of the opinion that lastborn children may have the assets of the firstborn (achievement), but not their handicaps (anxiety).

It would therefore seem that as each child enters the family environment he enters a unique and distinctive family interaction pattern that changes as each new child joins the existing structure. The challenge of the parents is to parent positively all the children within the family.

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Name of thesis: Birth order, parenting and stuttering.

PUBLISHER:

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg
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