

The idea that the person we become is partly defined by the order in which we come in our family was first proposed by Austrian psychiatrist Alfred Adler. Although Adler's theories have been challenged over the years, there are certain characteristics and life choices that seem remarkably consistent in oldest, middle, youngest and only children. This may mean fewer responsibilities and more opportunities for fun, but youngest children often find that they aren't taken as seriously or given the independence they crave. Adler believed that sibling hierarchy has a profound effect on our personalities, and can influence everything from the career choices we make to the people we fall in love with. Studies suggest that the differences between oldest, middle and youngest siblings have more to do with nurture than nature.

Only children Only children enjoy the same parental attention as first-borns and are often confident, conscientious and socially mature, due to the amount of time they spend in a largely adult world. It's more likely that they will have had both more input from their parents, and taken on the role of teacher for their younger siblings, thus strengthening their own knowledge.

Oldest children Typically responsible, confident and conscientious, they are more likely to mirror their parents' beliefs and attitudes, and often choose to spend more time with adults. Oldest children often have higher IQs, but this isn't necessarily because they are genetically more intelligent. Oldest children can be perfectionists and worriers, and may put pressure on themselves to succeed.