

## Advice for firstborns, aka "The Surrogate Parents"

Typical traits: responsible, logical, rule-abiding, perfectionist, driven, authoritarian

- **Take leave from your job as sibling CEO:** As the first to conquer life's key milestones, it's no wonder siblings looked up to you. But as your plate crowds with career demands and your own family's needs, acting like a surrogate parent to adult siblings can make you as weary as a pack mule climbing the Grand Canyon.

"Talk to your siblings openly," Haskew says. "They might not even be aware it's getting to you."

Adulthood should bring a softening of sibling hierarchy — and with it a cue to relinquish your role as surrogate parent. Try letting younger siblings organize the next family reunion or holiday get-together.

- **Avoid the temptation to give advice:** "If a younger sibling usually asks for your advice, you can say, instead, 'Hmm, that's an interesting problem. How have you been thinking about solving it?'" Stark says. "Your younger sibling may push for you to slip back into the old role and tell her what to do," she says. But remember now is the time to act like a peer, not a parent, before your sibling comes to see your well-intended advice as meddling.
- **Acknowledge your siblings' accomplishments:** As the firstborn, you may be used to high expectations from your parents. But in adulthood, your high-achieving and perfectionist ways may alienate others — especially siblings. When a younger sibling cooks a nice meal, offer a sincere compliment and don't act as if Halley's Comet just made a rare appearance in the night sky.

**Firstborns:** *Firstborns tend to seek greater acceptance and have a stronger need for*

*achievement; thus, they are more likely to achieve intellectual eminence, and are judges*

*as more serious, more seclusive, and more sensitive than later born children.*

## Firstborns

Firstborns often feel pressure to succeed or perform well, either by parents or through their own inner drives. They often are called on to take care of younger siblings or do chores because they are responsible. Firstborns also feel pressure to be good examples for their siblings.

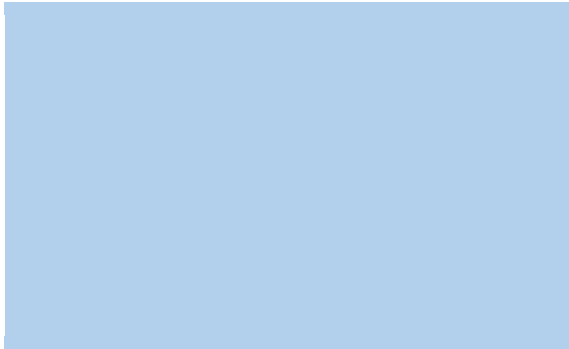
Some parents are quick to punish firstborns for not measuring up. Others constantly correct firstborns because they think it will help these children succeed. If firstborns cannot meet these expectations or **fear** that they cannot, they often become depressed and sometimes resort to [suicide](#) to escape the **pain** they feel.

Parents need to realize that firstborns need not be perfect in order to succeed. They are already eager to please and criticism should be limited to broad strokes rather than focus on minor imperfections. Responsibilities should be meted out in small batches according to their age appropriate abilities. In addition, parents should acknowledge firstborns as people, not the products of their efforts.

When placed in leadership or mentoring roles with their younger siblings, some firstborns may demonstrate aggressive or domineering behavior. They may boss their brothers or sisters around or lord it over them. These behaviors can also transfer to the school setting, making these children uncooperative with their peers. Parents should monitor leadership behavior to make sure these children learn to lead with kindness while respecting other people's feelings.

### First Child

- Is only child for period of time; used to being center of attention.
- Believes must gain and hold superiority over other children.
- Being right, controlling often important.



- May respond to birth of second child by feeling unloved and neglected.
- Strives to keep or regain parents' attention through conformity. If this failed, chooses to misbehave.
- May develop competent, responsible behavior or become very discouraged.
- Sometime strives to protect and help others.
- Strives to please.

## **Birth Order: First Born**

Anything a first-born child does is a big deal, simply because it's a first for his or her family. Until a second child comes along, family and friends usually shower first-borns with attention. As a result, many first-born



kids end up with a lot of natural confidence.

Even if you're not the very first child born in your family, you might have some "first-born" traits if you're the first son or daughter, or if you were born more than five years after your next-oldest sibling. If you're a twin, triplet, etc., the child who comes out first (even if it's just by a few minutes!) will often have first-born characteristics.



### **Did you know...**

- That almost all of the U.S. Presidents were either the first-born child or the first-born son in their families?
- All but two of the first astronauts sent into space were first-borns, and the other two were "only children"?

### **Famous First-Borns**

#### **Men**

George W. Bush

Bill Cosby

#### **Women**

Hillary Rodham Clinton

Oprah Winfrey

**Here are some personality traits that are common in first-borns:**

**Confident:** All that attention over everything you do makes you more likely to

believe in yourself.

**Determined:** Because your family might depend on you to get things done, you're probably good about finishing the projects you start.

**Born Leader:** Whether on the soccer field or in the classroom, you are often in charge. Oldest children are usually given the responsibility of baby-sitting and taking care of the house, so they get early training in being the boss.

**Organized:** You probably know where to find things, like your books, your Mom's keys, or your homework assignment. Even if your folders are a little messy, it's likely that you have a system.

**Eager to Please:** It's easy for oldest children to fall into this routine because they started out with a very strong need for Mom and Dad's approval, and eventually this spilled over to other adults such as teachers or coaches. When there's a job to be done, it's usually a first-born who jumps up and says "I'll do it!"

**Likes to Avoid Trouble:** When people expect a great deal from you, it can be hard to speak up or complain about something. You might not want to be seen as causing problems or less than "perfect."

So, being the oldest has its up and downs. There's definitely some pressure that comes with it! Parents might expect more of you and be more strict, especially if they're still setting up the rules of the family.

**If you're a first-born, these feelings may be familiar:**

- "Everyone depends on me."
- "I can't get away with anything."
- "I don't get to be a kid."
- "Why do I have to do it? Nobody else does anything around here."
- "How come I'm responsible for what my little brother or sister did?"

Given the role that a first-born plays in a family, these feelings are understandable...and very common! However, that doesn't mean you can't change things. It's important to talk to a parent about the responsibilities, expectations, and rules that you feel are unfair or are making you feel bad.