DEBUNKING THE MYTHS AND STEREOTYPES ABOUT THE MIDDLE CHILD? They are considered to be neglected, resentful, have no drive, have a negative outlook, feel like they don’t belong — in other words, that they suffer from “Middle Child Syndrome.” A Stanford University study showed that ‘middles’ are considered the most envious, least bold, and least talkative of all the birth orders.

The Truth about Middle Children

Yes! Middles are not embittered wallflowers—they are social beings and great team players. Middles tend to be cooperative and trusting in their friendships. Middles are successful leaders. For example fifty-two percent of our Presidents have been middles also included are Martin Luther King Jr., Abraham Lincoln, Bill Gates, J. R. R. Tolkien, Madonna, Katy Perry, Charles Hemworth — all are visionary middles with strong leadership qualities.

Although middles may seem neglected, both by parents and researchers, they actually benefit from this in the long run. They become independent, think outside the box, feel less pressure to conform, and are more empathetic. This gives them great skills as employees and also makes them excellent leaders, team players and partners.

Middles are more driven than we think. Most people see firsts as having drive and ambition but middles do, too, it’s just directed elsewhere. Middles are more oriented to principles and concepts, like justice, over earning power or prestige—for example, suffragette Susan B. Anthony and the Polish freedom fighter Lech Walesa. Middles are often motivated by social causes. And when they do enter into a more traditional business, they are great innovators and team leaders.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MIDDLE CHILD?

They are excellent negotiators, like Anwar Sadat and Michael Gerstner (CEO of Nabisco). Middles are used to not getting their own way and so they become savvy, skilful spin doctors. They can see all sides of a question and are empathetic and judge reactions well. They are more willing to compromise and so they can argue successfully. Since they often have to wait around as kids, they tend to be patient.

They are trailblazers, like Charles Darwin and William Dell. Middles are more likely to effect change than any other birth order. This is because of the combination of risk-taking and openness to experience leads to a willingness to try new things. One study, for example, showed that 85 percent of middles were open to new ideas compared to only 50 percent of firsts.

And middles are justice-seekers, like Nelson Mandela and Susan B. Anthony. They are focused on fairness; they perceive injustice in their family and are attuned to the needs of others as they grow up. Middles side with the underdog and practice what they preach.

WHAT ARE DOWNSIDES OR CHALLENGES THAT MIDDLE CHILDREN FACE?

- They have to work harder to overcome people’s negative preconceived notions of them — i.e., if you think middles are not that driven, charismatic, smart would you be likely to hire one?
- Middles have lower self-esteem than other birth orders because of their lack of uniqueness and attention at home—but this can actually be a positive as they don’t have huge egos.
- Also, self-esteem is not as critical as our society believes. Having an accurate sense of self-esteem is more important than having high self-esteem. Surprisingly, new studies show that high self-esteem does not correlate with better grades in school or greater success in life. It can actually lead to a lack of perseverance in the face of difficulties.
- It’s important to remember, too, that self-esteem fluctuates depending on successes and failures—older middles will end up with higher self-esteem than what’s reported by younger middles.
Finally, middles avoid rocking the boat, as they dislike conflict. This can cause problems because they may avoid addressing problems in marriage or at work. Middles can be taken advantage of by friends or co-workers—they are so trusting and cooperative and they can find it hard to say no.

THE MOST SURPRISING OUTCOME ABOUT MIDDLE CHILDREN AFTER THE RESEARCH?

An Israeli marital happiness survey shows that middles are the happiest and most satisfied in relationships, and that they partner well with firsts or lasts—but less well with other middles because they may both avoid conflict. Middles want to give their children structure and rules, but also want then to be free to make choices.

DOES GROWING UP A MIDDLE CHILD INFLUENCE ADULT LIFE, CAREER, AND RELATIONSHIPS?

Your family position relates to the jobs you’re drawn to and how you interact with people in the workplace. Middles are flexible, team-builders, independent, yet also social. They don’t need to be micromanaged. These are critical skills in the modern work world.

They tend to make good teachers, actors, social workers, diplomats yet would not be so good at work where they’re isolated (i.e., computer programmer) or when they have a position of authority in which they have to micromanage other people. Empathy can cause them stress. They make good defense lawyers, but not good prosecutors!

Their negotiation skills are beneficial in romantic relationships. An Israeli study concluded “middles are like type O blood” because they fit well with everyone. Remember how comedian George Burns was famously dedicated to his wife, Gracie, for decades after her death? He was a middle child. They are unwaveringly loyal to friends and partners.

ANY ADVICE FOR MIDDLE CHILDREN?

- The amount of parental attention received as a child doesn’t define how well you turn out.
- Sometimes you need to be able to walk away, especially when you’re being taken advantage of, and sometimes you need to step up to the plate — like when there’s conflict you simply can’t avoid.
- You’ll be happiest if you continue to carve your own path through life, and take calculated risks.
- You are moderate and well-balanced by nature, so don’t be afraid to rock the boat once in a while.

ADVICE FOR PARENTS OF MIDDLES?

Middles are social beings and often spend a lot of time with friends. They may seem secretive or withdrawn, but they are just dedicated to their “chosen families.” They like to establish their own circle and rely heavily on friends — that’s not a negative reaction to family life.

Don’t stress so much over how you’re dividing attention between your children — you are not handicapping your middle. They achieve because of the way they’re being brought up. They develop strategies and skills that stand them in good stead as adults.