

Parenting an Only Child

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How common are only children?

In the US today, families have an average of 1.9 children. 20% of women only have one child.

Benefits

Undivided attention: An only child doesn't feel like they have to compete for love and attention.

Easier to juggle other responsibilities: may be easier to manage career, parents may feel less frazzled and overwhelmed than if they had multiple kids to juggle, may be easier to travel.

Cheaper: Raising kids and paying for child care is very expensive. Parents of one may have more financial stability or be able to afford more "luxuries" than if they had multiple children.

Better for the environment: Each human we add to the earth has a big impact...

Strengths of Only Children

Research shows that only children score just as well as kids with siblings on traits such as maturity, popularity, generosity, cooperativeness, flexibility, independence, emotional stability and contentment. Only children have higher intelligence, are more motivated in school, have higher self-esteem, good language skills (from all that adult conversation), and better relationships with parents.

Parents of only children tend to be happier than those with multiple children.

Sources: www.nytimes.com/2013/06/09/opinion/sunday/only-children-lonely-and-selfish.html?_r=0
www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetails.aspx?p=114&np=99&id=1926

Potential Pitfalls and how to minimize

- Avoid the "lonely only." Help your child build lots of friendships, especially long-term friendships.
 - Ensure that your child has plenty of play time with other kids. Seek out long-term connections – friends or family your child will have the opportunity to interact with for years. That gives them some of the long-term history of relationship they would have with a sibling.
 - Consider joining boy / girl scouts, 4-H, church group, or some other long-term group activity.
 - Consider inviting friends along on family vacations so your child has a playmate.
- Help them learn to manage conflict. Only children don't have the built-in practice at conflict resolution that kids with siblings have. If they get embroiled in a playground conflict with a friend, try to sit back and let them figure out how to resolve it on their own.
- Don't pressure your child to be everything you ever hoped your child (or you) could become. In some families, onlies feel like all the hopes of the family are riding on their shoulders. They can become anxious, pressured perfectionists.
 - Let them be kids. Only children spend a lot of time in the adult world, with good manners and quiet voices. Make sure they also get loud-voiced, free-running time at the playground.
- Don't pressure yourself too much. Parent of only children often feel like they only have "one chance to get it right" and are very hard on themselves when they make any mistakes.
- Help them to be responsible and independent.
 - Give your child chores and expect them to get done. Imagine what you would expect out of each child if you had 4 kids, and no time to help them all. Expect that much out of your only.
 - Look for places where your child can teach and mentor a younger child.
- Don't spoil / over-indulge your child. Set clear limits, and be sure they don't always get their way. This also reduces the chance you'll have a "bossy" child. If they've learned that it doesn't work to boss you around, they won't try to boss others around.
- Find ways to teach and model generosity and sharing.
- Don't over-protect. It can be easy to become a helicopter parent, hovering closely around your only child. Try to stand back and give them space to make their own mistakes (and learn from them).