

Are you an incurable romantic? Do you know how to pick a wedding date for the first time you saw your fiancée? When thinking about setting a wedding date, you might consider having it on the same date that you met, or became engaged, or had your first date.

The Family Constellation

The concepts of a child are very much influenced by his position in the family. In the life of an only child, the parents are the most important figures during his first decisive years of life. The parents' reaction to the child's experimental efforts in dealing with them regulates the child's behavior, although not always in a desired and desirable fashion, because the child's idea of success does not always correspond with the parents'. He may think that they must serve him. Furthermore, the parents' personalities and their own behavior offer the child guiding lines in developing his own approaches; judging again from his own point of view, he adopts the methods and the behavior he considers effective.



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Unfortunately, again his opinion does not always coincide with his parents' as, for instance, when he finds that being afraid gets him special consideration. When the child has brothers and sisters, however, they generally become more important for his development than the parents, who then assume the role of moderators, accentuating and managing the position which each child occupies in the group. By emphasizing particular traits and abilities in each child, they play a part in the existing competition between the children, and are very often the power behind the scenes, unaware of pulling the strings, and bewildered by the results. The competition between brothers and sisters is one of the strongest influences in the development of every child. Its results are obvious, even if the children are devoted to each other and do not fight and quarrel openly. Signs of competition can easily be recognized,

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if one is acquainted with them.

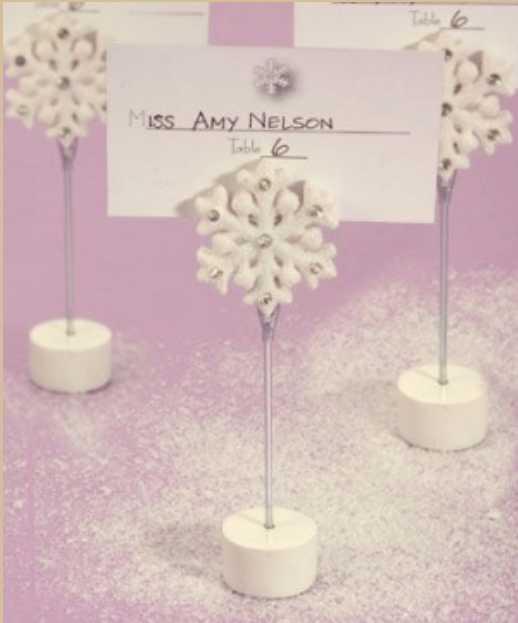
The competition among siblings starts with the peculiar relationship between the first and second child. The basic element for the maintenance of competition is provided by the child's inability to comprehend the importance of age. For a child, his brother or sister is simply stronger or weaker, more or less capable, irrespective of his age. Parents' soothing references to changing age-"You will be able to do that, too, when you're older"-are meaningless to the child. In two years he will be able to do what his older brother can do today; but, by that time, the older brother is again or still-

two years ahead. These two years make all the difference, not as years, but through their consequences in regard to difference in size, in power, in skill, in faculty. Age, as such, becomes a factor when used to play one child against the other. The degree of seniority is irrelevant. We have seen children whose seniority privileges were actually based on a very short time-interval. In some of my cases only seven or thirteen minutes made all the difference, qualifying one as the older with definite privileges of seniority.

Because the competition between the first child and the second is almost universal, such children offer the best demonstration of its significance. The first, having been for a time the only child, regards the second as threatening his privileged position. He finds himself compelled to share not only the time and attention, but also the affection of his parents, especially of his mother. The birth of a sibling is always a shock to an only child, who usually feels "dethroned." Even if he has been prepared for this event, he can hardly foresee the implications of a situation never experienced before. In the best case, he is sufficiently assured of his superiority as an older child, and may be willing to accept the coming of a playmate as rescue from isolation, splendid though it might have been.

Usually, however, the first-born watches with growing apprehension the development of the new-born baby. He perceives that his advantages in ability and functioning, tremendous at the outset, decrease with each month and year. He must fear the moment when the newcomer will be equal to him, because then it would take only one step further and the second one would be ahead of him. This fear generally materializes sooner than he anticipates. Parents not fully aware of this conflict foolishly play the younger against the elder, and thereby intensify the natural competition with disastrous results. When the child employs disturbing behavior to attract the attention previously exclusively his, parents become indignant; their

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delight with the charming little baby contrasts sharply with their display of disgust and annoyance at the older child, proving to him how justified his fears are.

The predicament of the older child is further complicated by the younger one's natural desire to compensate for his own difficulty. He constantly has another child ahead of him, who can walk, talk, manage himself, go to school, read and write, whereas he cannot. Isn't it only natural that he tries with all his force to strengthen his position? As soon as the second child discovers any shortcomings in his senior, he grasps this opportunity. Mother's casual remark that the elder one might take an example from the junior's cleanliness offers such an opportunity: now the second one can excel. The older, in turn fully recognizes the danger. Far from improving, as his mother had hoped he would, he is inclined to give up. His little brother, so much smaller and so much inferior, can do something better than he can. What's the use of trying any more?

This is a typical situation: One child, discouraged by the success of another, decides unconsciously that his strength lies somewhere else, leaving this particular field to the more successful competitor. Once the idea has taken root, a vicious circle ensues. The more one child gives up, the more the other one tries to establish his own superiority in this particular field, and the more successful he is, the less hope the other entertains. The green light for one is the red light for the other. And the parents, instead of breaking the vicious circle while it still is easily possible, intensify it by siding with the more successful child. The two children divide the world between them-where one may rely on his intelligence, the other one may develop his charm. If one is interested in studies, the other one seeks to excel in athletics. One is good in languages; therefore the other one is more interested in mathematics. One is reliable and dependable; the other becomes helpless and dependent. If one is exceptionally well behaved we can always look for his competitor, who pays the price. Success can be achieved by either the first or the second child-conditions and attitudes of the parents decide the outcome. Generally, the more pampered or suppressed one child is, the better chance has the other. In most cases, the chances are somewhat divided, so that neither fails nor succeeds completely in every regard. Under fortunate conditions, the competition may not lead to failure in any sense, but rather to successes in contrasting fields.