



Tips for Parents: Having an Only Child

Only children are one of the fastest growing segments of our population. Couples are waiting longer to have a child, and many have concerns about the economy, natural resources, and kids living in poverty that make them decide not to have more than one.

When children are the only child in the family, they experience certain benefits and drawbacks that kids in multi-child families don't. If you have an only child, here are a few Tips for Parents you should keep in mind:

Help Your Child Understand Their Importance in the World

Single children often receive a large amount of attention from their parents. This can be a wonderful thing that assists children in developing self esteem and succeeding in school. Sometimes, however, some children:

- Develop the idea that they are the most important person in the world
- Fail to learn how to act independently
- Believe they have the same rights as an adult

Help your child avoid these pitfalls by giving them a reasonable amount of loving attention, and by refusing to let them dictate all of your time. Let them know that while you love them and love spending time with them, you must also give your job, household, spouse, family and friends your time.

Allow your child to spend time at friends' houses and to participate in group activities in addition to school to help reinforce this concept. You can encourage your child's independence by assigning them chores and requiring them to play on their own regularly. And while a child should have some say in decisions that affect them, remember—you are the adult. Help your child develop an identity as a child, not as a grown up.

Learning Social Skills

Only children have a great opportunity to learn how to relate to adults early on, and that can help a child mature more quickly—at least in some areas. This is great, but it is important that kids have time to enjoy their childhood years before feeling pressured to behave as an adult.

It is also important for only children to learn how to relate to other children. If an only child doesn't participate in a variety of activities with other kids from the time they are toddlers, they may become shy, uninterested, or even anti-social with them.

Give your child the opportunity to interact with others their own age frequently. Observe your child to make certain he or she feels comfortable. If you have any concerns about your child's behavior with other kids, ask your pediatrician or consult a counselor.

It is also important that you regularly demonstrate (and require from them) worthy qualities such as sharing, compassion and compromise as examples for your child to learn from.

Spoiling is NOT a Good Thing

Spoiling your only child by allowing them to get most of what they want might feel good, but you're laying the foundation for disaster. Your child will become more demanding as they age, and will fail to learn that real life isn't as generous. They will also fail to learn to be thankful for what they have and for what others have given them.

Treats and toys are fun, but they don't teach a child to set goals, behave, or to be self motivated for success. Set limits and rules, stick to them consistently, and keep gifts for birthdays and holidays. If your child wants them in between, assign them chores and pay them an allowance only IF they do the job responsibly. Or, give toys and goodies as hard earned rewards—but only occasionally. A child must learn that doing well is its own reward and that can be difficult when their only motivation is another video game or pair of expensive tennis shoes.

For more information:

[Raising an Only Child](#)
[OnlyChild.com](#)

You may also find these related Tips for Parents helpful:

[Tips for Parents: Motivation and Learning](#)
[Tips for Parents: Discipline](#)