



## Tips for Parents: Large Families

The size of the typical American family has gone down significantly in the last two centuries. In 1800, the average number of children was 7, in 1900 it was 3.5. With the widespread use of contraception, today the average number of children per family is about 2. However, despite averages, family sizes vary widely and some couples have a large family.

### Reasons for Large Families Vary Widely

Some couples have a large number of children because their religion encourages it or forbids the use of birth control. But for many, the decision to have a large family is simply preference—one or both grew up in a big family, or they had no siblings and dream of a large house bouncing with happy kids.

### Organization of Large Families

Methods for keeping a big group of kids clean, fed, schooled and loved are many. Recent TV programs show families with extreme organization, where older children supervise and care for younger children, and bathing, laundry and eating happens in shifts. Other families are more relaxed, enjoying a little or a lot of chaos.

There is no one correct way to organize the care of a large family. What works for some families is a disaster for others. Experts agree that it's not the size of a family or the way you organize their care that matters most; instead, it's having enough time and resources to make sure each child has their basic needs met and feels cared for, supported, valued, loved and the parents can be regularly involved in their educations and lives.

### Eldest to Youngest—Sibling Roles

We've all likely heard that the oldest child typically is the most serious, the most responsible and the most driven; the youngest child is frequently spoiled and has less of a drive; and the middle child is often overlooked and more prone to behavior issues. While this can be true, what makes the most difference in how children turn out is the personality of the child and the attention and desires of their parents.

Some parents of large families are so overwhelmed by trying to keep the house in one piece and enough money coming in that they don't spend enough time with their children. All kids, regardless of their position in their family, need the significant involvement of their parents, and that includes much more than paying the bills and keeping the house in order.

Here are some tips for helping all kids in large families succeed in life:

- Strive to give each child individualized attention.
- Be a good listener, and encourage kids to express how they're feeling.
- Recognize each child's unique personality, and tell them what you appreciate about them.
- Make sure all kids feel accepted for who they are.
- Encourage kids to do better by supporting them and offering positive feedback and rewards. (Catch them being good.) Negative comments and punishments aren't nearly as successful in the long term.
- Recognize and praise effort over natural intelligence.
- Encourage each child to develop their own interests and talents.
- The squeaky wheel usually gets the grease. In a large family, it can be easy for the quieter children to slip under the radar. Schedule time with every child every week.

Older siblings can be a great help in caring for younger children, but should never be a substitute for a parent.

## **Large Family Benefits**

Kids raised in a large family can experience several unique benefits. There is always someone to play with and throughout life everyone has a large base of support. Most kids from big families have developed good social skills and have an accurate perspective of their importance in the world.

### **For more information:**

There are many websites with chat rooms, forums, articles, and tips for raising, feeding, cleaning, and educating a large family. A few to get you started include:

- [Lotsofkids.com](http://Lotsofkids.com)
- [Largerfamilies.com](http://Largerfamilies.com)
- [Largefamilynetwork.com](http://Largefamilynetwork.com)

You may also be interested in:

[Tips for Parents: Foster Parents](#)

[Tips for Parents: Adoption](#)