

ACTIVITY 9: BIRTH ORDER

Overview of the activity

By using experience relating to the birth order in participants' families, the activity aims to understand how quickly and subconsciously stereotypes are born and how misleading and harmful they might be.

Objectives

- Introduce participants to the early effects of stereotyping by focusing on beliefs and attitudes about birth order and its effects on personality.
- Help participants meet each other in an active manner, which sets the stage for exploration, self-disclosure and group discussion about stereotypes.

Duration (in minutes)

45 minutes

Min/max number of participants

- Recommended: 12
- Minimum: 3
- Maximum: no limit

Room/space requirements

This activity can be done either indoors or outdoors.

Materials needed	Preparation
List of questions on a handout or flipchart to ease the process	None required

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None required

Instructions

1. Begin the workshop by exploring some beliefs about how people are different. One way to do this is to look at birth order: for example, only child, first-born child, middle child, last child. Most of us have heard how people are supposed to differ according to their birth order, so let's find out more about those differences.

2. Form groups based on birth order. Gather into the following groups: only children, first-born children, middle children and last-born children.

3. Give a list of questions to each birth order group or just write the questions on a flipchart:

Talk about what it was like to be a first-born/middle/last/only child, etc.

What was positive and negative about your birth order?

Have there been any lasting effects in relation to your parents and siblings?

4. Allow 10 minutes for discussion.

5. Then, ask one birth-order group to remain silent for the next activity.

6. Ask the following questions to the rest of participants (the rest of group).

What do you think it's like being (first-born children or middle children, etc. – referring to the birth-order group that has been asked to be silent)?

What kinds of personality characteristics do you associate with each birth-order position?

Any variations? Do these characteristics hold true across all people? If not, why not?

7. When all comments about the specific birth-order group have been given that group is asked to respond to the birth-order group questions below.

To the birth-order group:

What was it like to hear comments about you being made by others?

What feelings did you have as you listened?

Did you agree or disagree?

How would you respond to what has just been said about you?

8. Allow about 20 minutes for debriefing (see evaluation).

This activity was adapted from the 'Valuing Ethnic Diversity' workshop, available at:
<https://cmhc.utexas.edu/clearinghouse/files/PT014.pdf>

Evaluation

Questions to close the discussion:

What did you notice about the nature of stereotypes, what was your experience?

What might be the danger of saying: 'There is a little bit of truth about stereotypes'?

Conclusion: Stereotyping about birth order begins at an early age, in a similar way to other stereotypes. Unless we call them out and revise these early formed stereotypes, we will continue to treat each other based on these preconceived assumptions.

Possible transition to other subjects: obviously the same is true for ethnic-related stereotyping, and this is what we should all be aware of; that is, the development of our racial attitudes and how experiences in our families, communities and society shape the attitudes we hold.

Teaching tips, stories and experiences during piloting

Some people will say that they feel like one type, while they actually are another, e.g. second-born children who feel like first-born because of a large gap in age between them and their older siblings. Instruct such people to go into the group with which they most identify.

If you work with a large number of participants, create subgroups within the birth-order groups.

Try to contextualize and transfer the impressions, conclusions and observations to other situations,

especially related to stereotypes related to race, gender, nationality, etc. (as indicated in the evaluation).

Questions for self-reflection in the teaching practice

Think about your own birth order. What is your attitude towards your birth order, and what stereotypes can you identify relating to birth order? Which position is the one for which you tend to have the most or strongest stereotypes? Can you identify stereotypes that you or the participants might have related to race, gender, nationality, etc.? In what way might this have an effect on the learning space (i.e. participation, preconceptions about commitment and/or work ethic, etc.).