Being the eldest is no fun

You’re born and from then on, everything revolves around you. Morning and night are determined by your sleep rhythms. If you’ve performed well they are in a good mood, if not, well someone’s in trouble but usually not you. Mummy spends hours talking about you, thinking about you, dreaming up fun things to do with you and just gazing at you. She scours the Internet every time you have a strange rash, takes you to the doctor when you cough and checks out every little thing with her new mummy friends and a host of new baby books. She thinks playing classical music to you would help your development and reading the classics, whatever is best for baby is what she wants for you. You are the centre, the plug hole around which the water whirls in every diminishing circles before eventually disappearing.

Then something happens. Mummy gets fatter, tired and moody and suddenly you seem to be spending a bit more time with daddy and maybe grandma or auntie. And then without even consulting you, mummy reappears with a tiny baby. At first you think, how sweet, a dolly that seems very flexible and realistic. Then you realise that actually it isn’t for you. Strange, because up until now you were rewarded with anything you wanted so long as it was safe. How is it that this rather exciting new toy that everyone’s fussing over is out of bounds?

It doesn’t take long to realise that you have to be nice to the toy in order to get any attention round here as they seem to have forgotten about you. If that doesn’t work then a good poke at it seems to do the trick although they usually aren’t very pleased about that. Sometimes you get the odd present, maybe even a doll of your own but it isn’t the same; mummy still seems to be more interested in her new one.

As time passes and you realise the toy is a baby that gets bigger and likes you a lot, it does have some advantages. Now you have someone to play with who has some different toys from you and they seem to be happy to play with you at any hour of the day. Whatever you do or say, this younger brother or sister thinks you’re wonderful, funny and once again you are special. The only trouble is that baby is more special. Being younger they can of course do no wrong even though you know very well that if you were to do the same thing you would be in big trouble. It starts to dawn on you that punishments aren’t fair any more. The same behaviour will be wrong when you do it and funny when your younger brother or sister does it. How can that be?

Yes whatever they do is understandable because they are young, they don’t know any better. “You have to show them how to behave” they say. “Hang on, when did I become the grown up around here?” Not only do you have to pretend you know what to do, never act silly and babyish, throw one of those temper tantrums that did the trick when you were their age but you also seem to have missed out on all the cuddles round here. What makes them think you are too grown up for cuddles and hugs, being read to at night, playing UNO? The only way to get any attention seems to be when you play with your sibling nicely, do your homework without being asked, get to bed on time and set a good example.

Yes everything has changed. You used to be special and loved just for being you and now you are the eldest child. One day you will be independent, confident, a leader in business and have a great sense of responsibility. You will know that this has come from being the eldest child. But for now, you are still a child yourself, aren’t you?

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