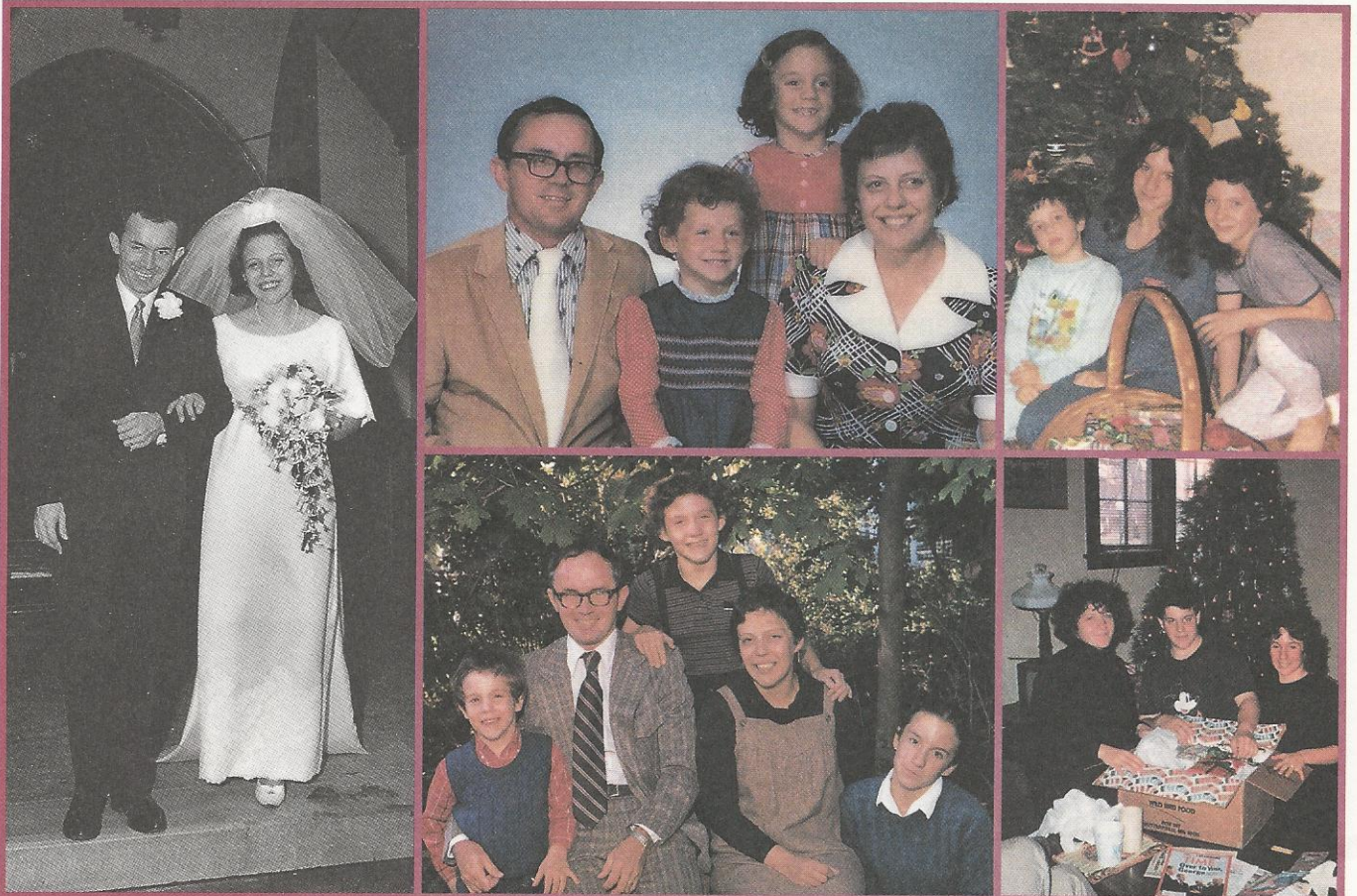


The Family



From the moment of birth until maturity is a long period of time for human beings. Each person arrives in this world completely helpless and defenceless. The developing individual has many needs — physical, spiritual, emotional, social, intellectual — and these needs are best met within a family. Above all, it is within the family that each person first learns to live in relationship with others.

Living in a Family

Although it is the responsibility of all families to nurture their children, each family is also unique. Each of us grows up in a family, but our experience is not exactly like anyone else's.

- Mai is growing up in an *extended* family. Her family members include her two brothers, her parents, her grandmother, an aunt and uncle, and two cousins. This household of ten people is a busy place, and Mai has never had the experience of coming home to an empty house. Her grandmother manages the house and looks after the children while her parents, aunt, and uncle work.

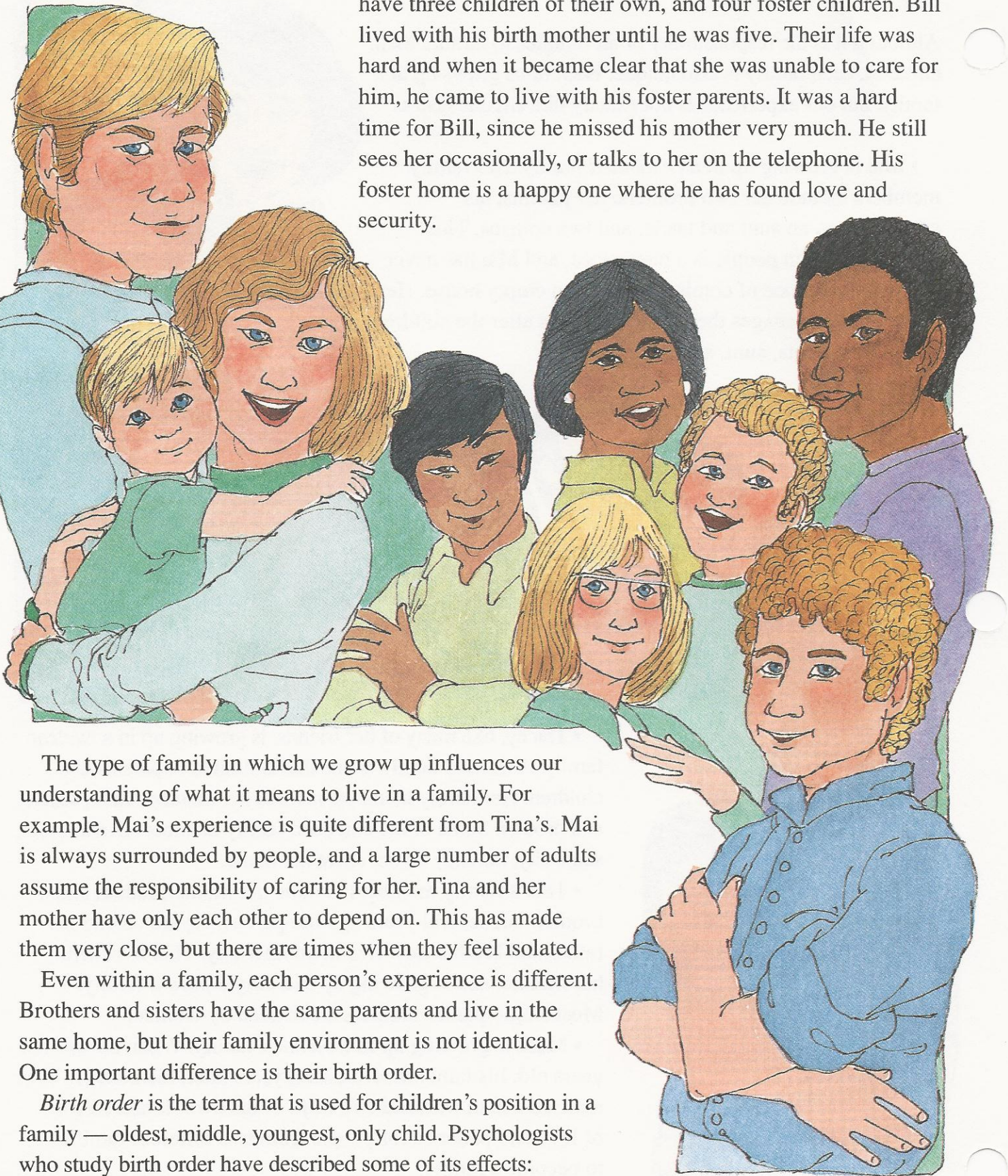


- Tracey, like many of her friends, is growing up in a *nuclear* family. A nuclear family is one that is limited to parents and children. Her family members include her mother, father, sister, and brother. Some of her extended family members live in the same city, but they do not share her home.

- Tina's family members include her mother, father, and a brother, but several years ago her parents separated and her father and brother now live in another city. Tina lives with her mother, and is growing up in a *single-parent* family. Most single-parent families are headed by women.

- Mark is growing up in a *blended* family. When he was ten years old, his father died. Several years later, his mother married a man who had two boys of his own. It takes a lot of love and patience for people from two different families to become a family.

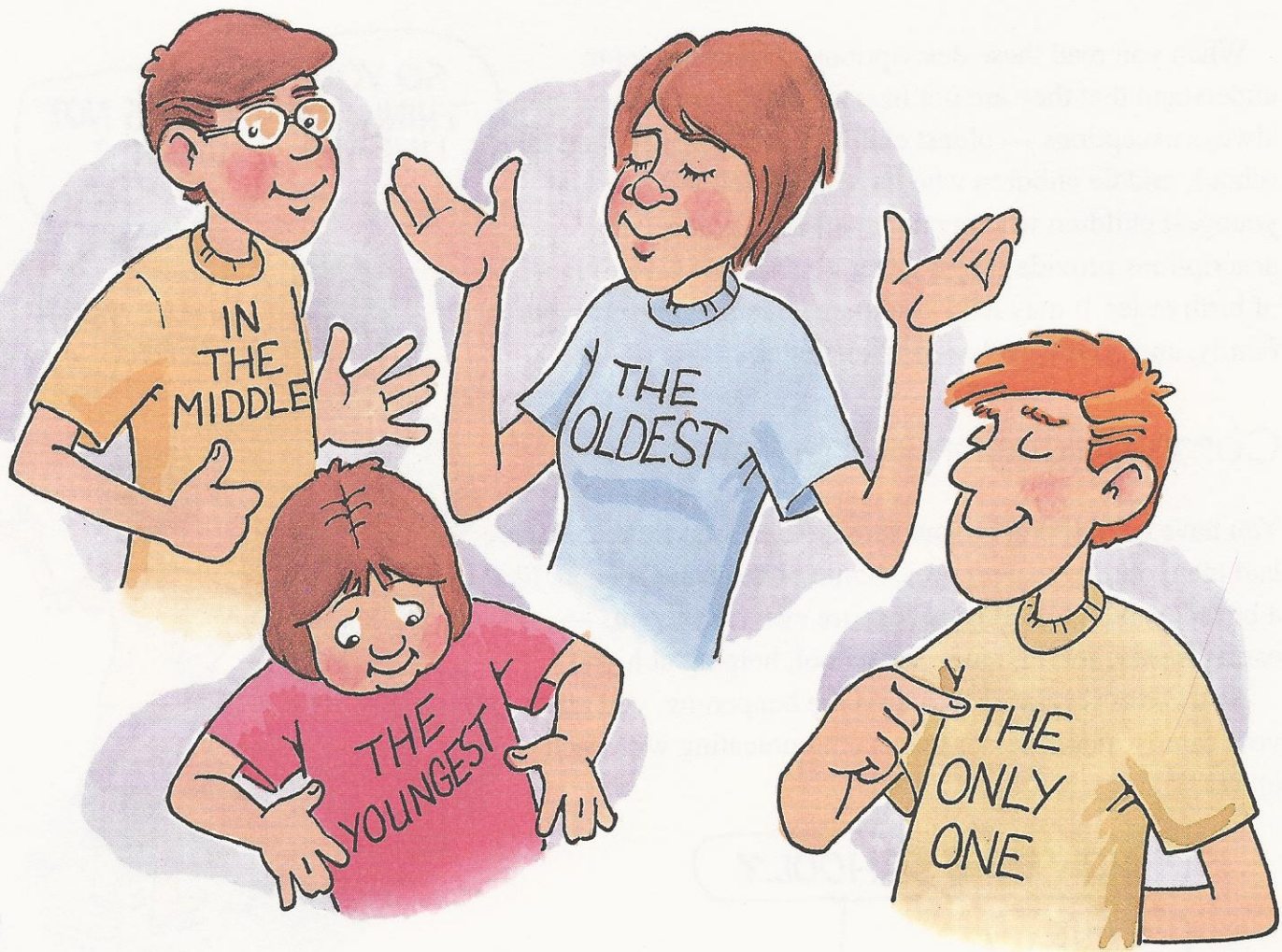
• Bill is growing up in a *foster* family. His foster parents have three children of their own, and four foster children. Bill lived with his birth mother until he was five. Their life was hard and when it became clear that she was unable to care for him, he came to live with his foster parents. It was a hard time for Bill, since he missed his mother very much. He still sees her occasionally, or talks to her on the telephone. His foster home is a happy one where he has found love and security.



The type of family in which we grow up influences our understanding of what it means to live in a family. For example, Mai's experience is quite different from Tina's. Mai is always surrounded by people, and a large number of adults assume the responsibility of caring for her. Tina and her mother have only each other to depend on. This has made them very close, but there are times when they feel isolated.

Even within a family, each person's experience is different. Brothers and sisters have the same parents and live in the same home, but their family environment is not identical. One important difference is their birth order.

Birth order is the term that is used for children's position in a family — oldest, middle, youngest, only child. Psychologists who study birth order have described some of its effects:



- Parents often have very high expectations for their first child. They expect her or him to be mature, to do well in school, and to take responsibility for younger brothers and sisters. Most firstborn children try to meet their parents' expectations, and so they tend to be good students and to work hard at everything they do. They expect a lot of themselves and worry when they're not successful.

- The youngest child in the family is often the most easy-going. By the time he or she joins the family, parents are more relaxed and have a lot of experience in raising children. Youngest children don't usually worry the way oldest children do, and although they complain about being bossed around, they also enjoy the attention that comes with being the "baby."

- The middle child in the family has a difficult position. It's hard to be neither the oldest nor the youngest. Middle children sometimes feel left out and wish people would pay more attention to them. But as they learn to get along with the oldest and the youngest, they often become quite flexible, and develop a gift for relating to a variety of people.

- An only child tends to have many of the characteristics of oldest children, but doesn't have the experience of growing up with younger brothers and sisters. Only children enjoy the undivided attention of their parents, although at times they miss the companionship that comes with being part of a larger family.

When you read these descriptions, it is important to understand that they are not like scientific facts. There are always exceptions — oldest children who don't do well in school, middle children who have never felt left out, and youngest children who are not at all easy-going. The descriptions provide only a general picture of the influence of birth order. It may help you to understand yourself, your family, and your friends a little bit better.

Communication in the Family

You have been living in your family for a long time, and have had many family experiences. Some of these are special, like a birthday, but most experiences are everyday events — eating meals, getting ready for school, helping at home.

As these everyday experiences are happening, you and your family members are busy communicating with each other.

