

PERSONALITY PLUS

Each of the Smith children is different. Johnny Jr. never meets a stranger. When not chatting on the phone, he's surrounded by several friends. On the other hand, sister Janey would rather curl up in the arm chair and read as Johnny's friends parade through the house. Socially, Janey prefers to spend time with her only best friend or to stay close to home. And then there is the baby of the family, affectionately nicknamed Bugs, who delights in organizing church, school, and neighborhood events. In his spare time he collects antique, model cars that he meticulously assembles with the precision of a craftsman. These three children are raised in the same family with the same parents – yet so unlike each other.

Over the years psychologists have whittled the various personalities down to four main types. While the names for each category may vary from one researcher to the next, the personality traits remain the same. Gary Smalley and John Trent, well-known counselors, labeled the four types after animals: lion, otter, golden retriever, and beaver. Because each animal name is so descriptive and easier to remember than clinical language, I will use Smalley and Trent's model in this article.

Although environment and circumstances affect personality development, each individual is born with a distinct and unalterable personality type. When I discovered this information in the early 1980's, it changed all of my relationships for the better. Parents who detect their children's personality types will understand why Johnny Jr. cleans his room in ten minutes and Bugs takes an hour to clean only half his room. It is no longer a mystery why Janey daydreams during math class. Since most families include a representation of each personality type, let's find out "who we are".

Lions are the leaders of the world. Determined, confident, and bold, they take charge to complete the job. They enjoy challenges, are decisive, and great problem solvers. Their motto is "*Let's do it now!*" Underlying these strengths, however, are glaring weaknesses. Easily bored with details, they are difficult to please. Opinionated, arrogant, and insensitive to the needs of others, they effortlessly leave a bloody trail of hurt feelings behind them. You will find *lions* in positions of leadership, crusading for causes, and participating in athletics. Becoming your top students, *lions* generally pursue their education with initiative and great care. As you "train up" your *lion*, teach him to cultivate compassion and tolerance.

Playful, carefree, and talkative describe the *otter*. As the life of the party, they build new friendships at every opportunity. Networkers, they seem to know everyone. They make good first impressions, breed enthusiasm, and live for the present moment. Taking risks without a care, their motto is "*Trust me; it will work out!*" On the down side, *otters* are unpredictable, lacking in self-control, and disorganized. The self-help books for "messies" are written for them. Easily distracted, *otters* leave a string of unfinished projects in their wake. However, *otters* make the best salesmen, actors, and motivators. On a leadership team, they spark vision and enthusiasm. Want a fun boss? Find a person with a *lion/otter* personality. Because they are socializers, school remains a low priority for them. If they complete their assignments at all, it will be in a last minute flurry of activity. Paperwork is their nemesis for any job or school work. Never one for details, they scurry through obligations like a whirlwind, leaving the details for those behind them. Training an *otter* can be frustrating, especially if your personalities clash. Patiently guide him to develop self-control, integrity, and reliability.

Beavers love those details that *otters* despise! Creative, self-disciplined, and intellectual, *beavers* strive for quality. Sensitive, predictable, and orderly, their motto is "*How was it done in the past?*" As perfectionists, they tend to be overly critical. Prone to depression, revenge, and moodiness, *beavers* can be disagreeable. While *beavers* lean towards the creative occupations like musicians, artists, writers, tailors/designers, culinary arts, interior decorators, and architects, they also fill the ranks of accountants, inventors, and philosophers. Our best elementary teachers, who never tire of drilling our heads with phonics rules and the multiplication tables, are usually *beavers*. In school, *beavers'* assignments remain the neatest and most thorough. However, their attention to detail will cause them to labor and fret needlessly over exams and projects. Help your *beaver* to understand that it is all right for some projects to be imperfect

and to not expect everyone to live up to his stringent standards.

The "sweetheart" of all four personality types is the *golden retriever* – calm, dependable, and amicable. *Golden retrievers* are faithful friends, good listeners, and stable. To keep the peace, they avoid confrontation at whatever cost. They can be passive, unenthusiastic, and very stubborn. Since *golden retrievers* hate change, their motto is "*Let's keep things the way they are.*" If motivated to lead, *golden retrievers* make the best leaders because they direct with a pleasant manner that *lions* lack. Their temperament makes excellent counselors, diplomats, and elementary educators. As homebodies, they love to putter around the house. Working well under pressure, they handle school adequately, although they lack initiative and rarely exceed minimum requirements. Find ways to motivate your *golden retriever* and help him to develop initiative.

Most people exhibit one primary personality type along with one or two secondary types. As parents guide their children to overcome personality weaknesses, they will then nurture their strengths. Understanding the children's personality types enables parents to more successfully train their children.