**Herd mentality**

**Source:** [www.onpurposeparents.com](http://www.onpurposeparents.com)

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What image comes to mind when you hear the words “herd mentality”? Here are just a few that popped up for me:

* Wildebeest in droves migrating across the Masaai Mara.
* A sheepdog boisterously keeping a herd of sheep massed together.
* The protective band of elephants coming to the rescue of the baby calf in need.
* Cattle being led across the prairielands in unison.
* Twelve little soccer players “beehiving” all around the soccer ball.

For the most part, images of herds of animals likely came to mind. But, have you ever pictured the words “herd mentality” as applied to parenting? Go with me:

* Implementing the same sleep training methods for each baby.
* Using the exact same method of discipline for each of your children.
* Signing all your kids up for the same sports at the same starting ages.
* Expecting the same study habits to be mimicked in each of your high schoolers.
* Desiring each of your children to follow the same educational pathway after graduation.

I did not realize how much I approached parenting with a “herd mentality” once they outnumbered us as parents. As a mom of four kids, I quickly learned that “herd mentality” simply would not work. Of course, there are times in which using the same parenting method does work for multiple children. But at the end of the day, God has blessed us with four fearfully and wonderfully made unique individuals. And as such it warrants some fearfully and wonderfully different and unique approaches to parenting each of them. Now don’t get me wrong, it does not require an entirely different approach with each child, but consider some of these areas where some individualized parenting may need to come into play:

* **Communication** – this is in both directions. Assess how you communicate with each child as their receipt of your words can vary based on their learning style, developmental age and overall personality. Likewise, understand that each child will communicate differently in their words, non-verbals and approaches. What we can deem as unhealthy  or bad may actually just be different and we can adapt accordingly.
* **Expression of Emotions** – similar to communication, each child will express emotions differently. Avoiders do just that, avoid emotions at all costs. A close cousin to the avoider is the stuffer, pushing the feelings down inside but they eventually come out in an explosion or even somatic symptoms. What we can negatively label as overly sensitive may  be a highly expressive (at least emotionally) child or even one that simply needs help in emotional regulation.
* **Discipline –**the means by which you redirect your child will vary based upon your child’s response. Some work for the reward in eager anticipation, while others cannot wait for the delayed gratification. Some shape up with the mere threat of a consequence, while others seem unphased by negative consequences. Some lose it at the thought of a timeout or grounding, while others defiantly tighten up and take it without response. Whatever methods you use, be willing to adapt to what will best motivate your child in the direction he/she should go.
* **Likes/Dislikes** – this one is probably the least surprising, but each child’s likes and dislikes will vary. This goes for everything from taste buds to music and hobbies to reading topics. First, do not expect your child to adopt what interests you. While it feels “extra special” when your child carries on the same sport lineage, it should not be an expectation placed on every child. And if a child genuinely does not like certain foods this just might be his/her preference not a problem.

Hear me out, the goal is not to cater to each and every special need presented by each of your children. The goal is NOT to become a short-order cook, specialized tutor or enabler to each of your children. However, recognize that just as each of your fingerprints is dramatically different in the fine details so too are your children. And as such, your parenting will likewise need to make some shifts and adaptations in order to meet these unique creations wherever they are at. Start with taking the time to get to dig deep in getting to know what your child may individually need and break free from the herd mentality.