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Sons and daughters

Is an all-boy family very different from having an all-girl family? What is it like to be totally outnumbered by the opposite sex in your own home? To find the answer, TV's Channel 4 asked Marianne and Jon Tibbett, the parents of four daughters to swap homes with Karen and Steve Cafaeiro, who have four sons.

The Cafaeiro family



Karen talks about her family

Karen Cafaeiro, 43, lives with her husband, Steve, 59, a manager at Jaguar Cars, and their sons Francis (17), Alex (15), Joseph (11) and Samuel (9). Karen is an accountant. She says:



'I married Steve when I was 21. I'm the oldest of four children and I always wanted a big family. Also, I wanted a son for Steve, he's very sporty, loves his football, so he's delighted to have four sons. The boys love kicking balls and racing around on their bikes. They don't see danger. Steve says I mustn't worry. He says boys will be boys. Sometimes I feel left out of all their sport, but I'm pleased that I don't have to watch football in the pouring rain. The boys see everything in black and white. I should learn not to ask them about their lives and feelings. 'Dunno' is their usual answer. I have often wondered what a family of girls would be like.'

The swap – Karen and Steve Cafaero go to the Tibbett home

When Karen and Steve arrived at the Tibbett family home, she had to laugh. There were piles of pink ballet shoes and riding boots all over the floor. Karen says:

'The four girls are as passionate about dancing and horse-riding as my boys are about football and rugby, but I was shocked by the mess. I have strict rules for my boys. They can't wear their shoes upstairs and they have to tidy their rooms. The girls were so excited to see us, they wanted to chat and ask us questions. It was fantastic, but exhausting. They came to help me cook in the kitchen, they didn't want to play in the garden. I think girls need more attention than boys. Another shock for me was how nice the girls were to each other. The boys love each other but they fight and fall out endlessly.

The thing I loved most was shopping with the girls. We had great fun. I miss that with boys. Poor Steve had to carry the bags. I saw a big change in him. With girls he was so sensitive and gentle.

I loved the chats with the girls, but I also like my own space. I think girls are harder work.'



The Tibbett family

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Marianne talks about her family

Marianne Tibbett, 38, lives with husband, Jon, 45, and their daughters Annabelle (14), Francesca (11), Genevieve (9), and Catherine (8). They run a haulage business together. Marianne says:

‘Jon and I met and married within six months. He was 29. People often ask us if we have so many children because we were trying for a boy. But this isn’t true. I’m an only child and it was my dream to have a big family. We were delighted when Annabelle arrived and equally delighted when Francesca arrived three years later, followed by Genevieve and Catherine. Jon loves having four girls, he is their superhero dad! Our daughters are fabulous. Most of the time they get on really well together. They’re a chatty group! But we were fascinated to try living with boys.’



The swap – Marianne and Jon Tibbett go to the Cafaero home

Marianne expected the Cafaero boys to be loud and boisterous. In fact on the first day they were very quiet and polite. Marianne says:

‘They even took their shoes off before going upstairs. However, I soon realized why Karen and Steve had to have such strict house rules. The boys were constantly on the go and wildly competitive. They raced around the garden and dived into the pool. There was a fight between one of the little boys and his big brother. I tried to make them apologize, which is what I do with my girls, but it just made them more angry. The little one went away by himself, cried, then forgot all about it.

But the biggest shock for me was the change in my gentle husband. He became more and more competitive. We all went go-karting. We’ve never done this with our family. Jon joined in with the boys and it was clear he wanted to win as much as they did. He had great fun and I loved seeing him so happy. I know he would love to have had a son to continue the business. But now we’ve seen the reality of having boys! They’re exhausting. **I honestly think they’re much harder work than girls.’**