

BECOMING A PARENT

ARTICLE

Becoming a parent may be a mixed blessing. Clearly, it is costly in terms of time and money. The financial cost of raising a child from birth to young adulthood come to \$175,000 on child-rearing costs, and families with higher incomes spend about \$372,000 per child. However, many people point to the emotional benefits of raising a child, which are less tangible. To examine the consequences of raising a child, research has investigated the link between having children and parental happiness. Initial work suggested that child-rearing exacts a toll on parental happiness: Spouses who raise children appear less happy than childless spouses. Overall, these studies reported that parents experience greater anxiety, depression, and marriage dissatisfaction than spouses without children.

However, studies that reported a happiness deficit for parents often painted the entire population of parents with a single broad brush. Early studies didn't consider differences between nations, age, cultural background. Happiness deficit existed for parents from some nations, parents from other nations experienced a happiness surplus. For example, compared with childless couples, parents from Norway and Hungary tend to be happier. The country with the largest happiness deficit related to having children was the United States.

DIFFERENCES

The differences seem to come down to whether the nation has social policies that help parents face the challenges of balancing paid work with the responsibilities of child-rearing. Countries such as Norway, where parents are happier than nonparents, tend to have family-friendly policies, including paid parental leave, affordable and subsidized child care, more government-protected paid vacation and sick days, and greater work schedule flexibility. These social policies were important to the happiness of both mothers and fathers. In fact, both parents and nonparents were happier in countries with these social policies in place.

Government and corporate policies that support children's well-being seem to benefit society; for example, these policies are linked to lower crime rates and increased productivity.

So do children contribute to our happiness? A recent study examined the link between having children and happiness from two surveys completed by almost 120,000 people (Herbst & Ifcher, 2016). They identified two trends: First, compared with nonparents, parents are becoming happier. Second, nonparents are increasingly reporting lower levels of happiness. Some other studies are now beginning to show that having children may actually produce a happiness surplus. However, I wonder if happiness is the best outcome measure.

DO WHAT'S RIGHT FOR YOU

In the end, it comes down to what's right for you, it's not a decision anyone should make lightly (there's no turning back once you're a parent!). JTS says: "I guess my only honest advice is to really think hard about it. It seems like a lot of people have kids because that's just what people *do*. Whatever choice you make, do it intentionally. Think about your threshold for chaos, what you want your life to look like in 30-40 years, and (unfortunately this need to be said) your economic ability to support a child, or multiple children."

Perhaps a good litmus test would be to spend more time around more types of kids. "I don't have kids yet, and I always thought I wanted them, but as I got a little older I wasn't sure. So many kids are like little monsters, and it sounds exhausting! I hadn't ruled it out, but I thought that maybe if I didn't have kids, I probably wouldn't be too sad about it. However, my fiancée's brothers both have kids, and they're amazing. After spending time with her nieces, it's hard for me to imagine a life in which I don't have kids—I'd just get so sad every time I saw these kids knowing I'd never have any of my own. Sure, they're a lot of work, but it seems totally worth it."

There's no right or wrong answer—just careful, deliberate choices.

SO WHY PEOPLE WANT TO HAVE KIDS?

1. They want to create a family full of joy and love where they can be affectionate to their children. Essentially, they have placed a high priority on creating a family of their own like their parents.

2. To Carry on the Family Name and Values. They find joy in knowing that their child will bear their last name and keep the family going. Again, this is all based around societal customs.
3. They Love Babies and Small Children. These people may want to relive the silly and fun parts of their childhood with their child.
4. It's Human Nature. The simple fact of biology is that we are hardwired to procreate and pass on our genes to the next generation. This biological imperative and drive are strong in many people, who feel the need to have and raise children.
5. To Give and Receive Unconditional Love. There is a certain type of bond between parent and child that is incredibly powerful.
6. To Let Their Children (Who Don't Exist Yet) Experience the Joy of Existence. Parents want to see their child grow up and become a productive member of society.
7. While it may seem obvious to some, having a child completely changes your life, and it gives new meaning to your life. After having a child, you become responsible for their life and because of that, your existence takes on a whole new meaning.
8. Many people love the idea of getting to create and raise a child, one that they can share their love with.
9. Not everyone gets to grow up in a stable home environment with good parents. So they decide that when they become parents they will not make the same mistakes.
10. Their mentality is that they must have kids just like everyone else and be just like their parents. It has become an expectation that couples have children and start families.

WHY THEY DON'T?

1. According to a study done by Lund University in Sweden, not having a kid can save "an average of 58.6 tones of CO2-equivalent emissions per year".
2. Economic Impact - According to the USDA, the cost of raising a child amounts to around \$233,610 from birth until age 17.
3. The amount of stress placed on the parents while raising a child are enormous, particularly on the mother as she tends to wind up having the biggest burden.
4. While many people claim that having kids has made them happier, there is a growing mound of evidence that suggests that is not actually the case as already written above.
5. As one could imagine, parents do not get a lot of sleep, and this is not healthy for the body or the mind.
6. Much like poor sleep quality, poor eating habits and poor health increase when raising a child.
7. With the world's population now over 7 billion people, the competition for housing and resources is only becoming worse.
8. The logistics of two parents raising a child can be difficult to navigate. With the costs of childcare factored in and the growing need for both parents to work full time, it puts even more stress on the parents to find a way to make everything work.
9. Many individuals have mental and physical health issues that run in the family and could be passed down to future generations. Having a child born with these issues may be something that potential parents do not want to deal with.

QUESTIONS

1. Did you plan to have kids? Did you plan the time of your pregnancy?
2. Why did you want to have kids? How many?
3. Did it make you happier?
4. How different is the parenthood from your imaginations as you were childless?
5. If you could choose now, would you like to have kids? Would you like to have them earlier or later?
6. Do you think it is better to have kids at 18 or 30?
7. How did the kids change your life? Negative and positive?
8. How happy are you with the names of your kids?
9. Did the way your parent raised you affect how you raise your kids (what you know about)?
10. How good are you at implementing innovative ways of raising kids you've read about or studied?
11. Do you think that raising a kid is a challenging thing to do? Why?
12. Is there anything you see as the most stressful thing about raising kids?
13. What is the biggest "I should know before" from maternity?