

WHEN ARE YOU READY?

How do you know when you are ready to have children? Several areas of readiness need to be considered:

MARRIAGE READINESS

Remember when we talked about the stages of dating: Stage 1 is Gushy, Stage 2 is Game Playing, and Stage 3 is Goal Directed. You go through the stages all over again after you are married. The gushy stage occurs again during and after the honeymoon, then you go into game playing as you try to adjust to each other. Eventually, you will get to the goal-directed stage. Be sure you are in the goal-directed stage before planning to have a baby. (You will probably go through the stages again after the baby is born!)

The first year of marriage is an important one for adjustments to each other's day-to-day living habits, intimacy, extended families, and the financial aspects of your new marriage. It is also a time for building successful patterns of communication with each other, resolving conflicts, working out roles in the marriage, and forming a successful marriage partnership. A good marriage is based on knowing each other well.

The stability that this time and effort can give a marriage can be jeopardized when a new baby enters the relationship too soon. Even a baby who is wanted and planned for adds major stress to a marriage. A huge increase in responsibility adds to an increase in disagreements, a change in marital roles, a strain on communication, a decrease in time together, financial strain, jealousy, fatigue, and a temporary decrease in marital satisfaction.

It is wise to postpone having your first baby until the marriage is stable, which may take a year or more. Having children strengthens stable marriages. Having a baby makes a weak relationship weaker.

FINANCIAL READINESS

Initial expenses include thousands of dollars for doctor and hospital bills and for baby food, diapers, clothing, cribs, strollers, toys, etc. for the baby.

If both parents work, child care is a costly necessity. The loss of time spent with the child during his/her formative years is a major issue. Most families need more than one income to survive.

As the child grows older, expenses increase. Not only are there increased costs of clothing and food but increases in cost of living space, as you need a house or bigger apartment with play areas, utilities, insurance, recreation, education, sports fees, dance and music lessons, savings for college, etc. It will cost parents as much as \$250,000 to raise each child, just to the age of eighteen.

You do not need to save the entire \$250,000 before deciding to have a baby, but you do need to be financially stable.

EMOTIONAL READINESS

Are you ready to think of someone else other than yourself for the rest of your life? When you are a parent that child's needs come before anything else. Your time is not yours anymore. Not that you can't have some free time to yourself, but that child's needs will always be your first consideration. Do you resent having your time infringed upon? Do you get angry when your sleep is disturbed? Will it upset you when you can't do what you want to do? Will you resent spending a lot of money on someone else (your child)? Do you like to share your things? How is your temperament? Do you get frustrated or angry easily? Are you a good listener and problem-solver? Can you communicate expectations and needs? Are you ready to settle down to routines and responsibilities that are long lasting?

SOCIAL READINESS

What are some of the things you like to do for fun with friends (ski, movies, sports, parties, hiking and camping)? Which of these activities could you do with a baby in your arms? Relate stories of trying to go to restaurants with a baby who cries so much that it disturbs the other customers, or causes you to leave early. Can you enjoy a movie when at any second the baby could start crying or fussing and cause you to leave the movie early? Could you take a baby skiing? Camping? Could you afford baby sitters every time you did these activities? Would it be good to leave a baby with a sitter every time you wanted to do these activities?

When you say yes to parenthood, you say no to much of your social life. Your friends will become those who also have babies and do not mind getting together at one of your houses so you can all bring your babies. You will all chatter about your perfect baby and all the things he can do. Social life is much different for parents than for childless couples.

INTELLECTUAL READINESS

Do you have **realistic** expectations about childhood, or do you think babies always smell good, are potty-trained by age two, and go to sleep when you put them in bed?

Do you understand the principles of child guidance and development? Do you know what to do if your baby cries, won't eat, or is afraid of the dark? Do you know why children behave as they do? Do you understand what children are like? And more importantly, why they are like they are.

Do you understand the responsibilities and commitments of parenthood? Do you know that it is a 24-hour-a-day job with no weekends off, no vacations, and no sick leave? The job does not end when the children begin school, graduate, or move away from home; it is a lifetime commitment.

PHYSICAL READINESS

The health of the child depends on the health of the parents. Good nutrition, good health, and freedom from alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs, beginning long before conception, are important for both the father and mother. Are you preparing your body now for future parenthood?

When is the most healthy age to become parents? Mothers that are too young and older mothers may have more complications. Age is less important for fathers.

MORAL READINESS

Are your values and goals in life well established? What is your moral sense of what is right and wrong? You will be teaching these values to your children. Are your values and goals as a couple compatible? Positive parenting has a direct effect on our society, will you be teaching the next generation to be morally responsible?