

Trials and Rewards of Having Children



Remember the early years of marriage, when you were an easy-going couple? You could pack up and go away for a weekend on short notice. You spent most of your free time doing what you wanted; talking, laughing, playing, and creating new adventures. There was a kind of simplicity and rhythm to your life together.



Enter your first child. A new phase of your life together begins. The focus and flow and of your days together shifts to heightened responsibilities. Between diaper changes and other daily pressures, you keep hoping to sandwich in a bit of time for yourself and for each other.



This transition brings such a complex array of emotions. You enjoyed your lives together B.C. (before children) and also love being a family. There will be a couple's life again A.D. (after their departure)... but how can you sustain your relationship along the way?



It's easy to blame "having children" for the new tension in your relationship. Let's face it though...children do not create marital problems. The problem begins when parents allow parenthood to become the entire focus of their relationship and neglect the pleasures you both found in each other to begin with.



Parenting Years Are Demanding...

- *Children are inherently self-centered.* They focus on their own needs, not the needs of others. This is a normal part of their survival system and they are unaware of its impact on their parents.
- *Children demand attention.* The parent's job is to prepare their children for adulthood. Doing the job well demands energy

and ceaseless attention to detail. Almost two decades are devoted to teaching our child to leave home and begin a more independent life.

- *Children require more of us, not less, as they age.* While some parents believe their children need less from them as they grow, it is not true. The way they need you may shift, but the need for active, conscious parenting remains.

Pitfalls to Avoid:

- *Letting your children's demands control your life.* There's a difference between giving to your child versus giving in to your child. If a parent is not clear about this difference and crosses that line, they become trapped. Children will want more and more if parents continue to give and give. The emphasis needs to be on meeting our children's needs, rather than everything they want. Children who are not over-indulged grow up healthier, with a balanced view of the world and the people in it.
- *Falling for the "neighborhood norms".* It's amazing how many parents slip into taking their cues from what they observe about their neighbors. The better route to take as parents is to slow down, think out the issues, and weigh the decisions in the context of your values. Talk together as parents and do what makes sense to both of you, rather than to rely on what every-



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one else is doing.

- *Being seduced by materialistic values.*
While social status, salary and fine neighborhoods can be nice rewards for your hard work, be sure you do not let them define your values. A close marriage, sharing good times and having a real connection are more enduring than acquiring "things."

If you are going to thrive as a couple AND be effective parents, you must hold your marriage as a high priority. The biggest gift you can give your children is a thriving relationship.

Remember, as a couple, you will be together long after your children are on their own. Keeping your marriage strong, attending to it as you do your children, will help you enjoy one another after the kids are gone.

There is life after parenthood. It's up to both of you to make it so.

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