

## The Baby Carriage

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"Go forth and procreate!" This used to be an actual part of all religious marriage ceremonies. "And may their first child be a masculine child!" That is a quote from "The Godfather."

Children, grand children, carrying on the family name has always been an obsession in this country. The entire purpose of marriage used to be about having children and becoming a "family." I say "used to" because times have changed.

Rarely do you hear anything about children mentioned in most modern day wedding ceremonies and many couples who choose to marry today, do so having already agreed that they will never have children.

After choosing the person one wants to marry, having children is probably the most important decision a couple will ever make, one that will change their lives forever.

I will say that all of the people interviewed for this blog who have children said that they feel blessed by their children and, for the most part, having children made their marriage stronger.

On the other side, those who chose not to have children are also happy with their decision and reported that their marriage is happier and healthier because of that choice.

One reader, Kathi commented, "there are basically two kinds of marriages in our society; those who have children and those who do not." She continued, "having children changes the dynamic of the relationship."

Let's look at the affect having children or not has on a marriage.

### The Decision To Have Children:

Smart couples discuss their views on children **BEFORE** they get married. I have found in my research this is a very important issue and before vows are exchanged, couples should be on the same page about having children as when they are not, disaster can occur.

For those who have children, all reported that their children are a blessing but for sure, changed their marriage. Many shared that after having children, everything becomes about or for the children.



Making the transition from two adults responsible for **ONLY** themselves to having this newborn, innocent and totally dependent child to care for is a daunting realization. To realize that this tiny little baby needs you 24/7 and you must put his/her needs before anything you feel you need or want; can be quite overwhelming.

For the most part, my readers said having children made their marriages stronger. That they do, at times, fight over their children; but at the end of the day, their shared commitment to raising their children together, giving their children the best of both parents, becomes more important than any disagreements on how the children should be raised.

Some readers commented that after having children, they tended to put all their energy and attention into the children, ignoring their spouse and this caused stress and issues in the marriage.

Some spoiled their children against their spouses wishes, also causing stress in the marriage.

A very important issue is of course the way things have changed since many of my readers were children, being raised by a "stay at home mom."

Today women find themselves being, cook, maid, chauffeur, nanny, gardener, nurse, referee and, in many cases, bread winner who earns the money that supports the family.

I hear from many women that it is just too much and can cause resentment in a marriage. Husband goes out to work every day, comes home, eats the dinner the woman prepared after a long day at work herself, leaves the dirty dishes for her, the woman to wash and then kisses the kids she has been with for 5 hours goodnight and crawls into his bed for a nice long night's sleep.

The happiest marriages that include children seem to be the ones where both spouses share parenting responsibilities and work to be on the same page when it comes to decisions concerning their children.

One thing that can really damage a marriage is when either spouse believes the other intends to have children only to find out later, after the marriage they they have changed their mind. We have all seen the soap operas where a woman secretly stops taking birth control in order to "trick her spouse into thinking her pregnancy was an accident."

Some men tell their spouse they want children before the wedding and afterward decide they are "just not ready" or "the time is not right." Some have gone as far to either lie about having a vasectomy before the marriage or secretly having on after.

One reader shared that her husband wanted children more than she did and after their daughter was born, he lost all interest in the child he claimed was so important to him.

Having children or not having them can be a deal breaker in a marriage and should be honestly discussed **BEFORE** taking vows. A marriage that starts out with a lie about such an important decision can be doomed to fail.

**No Child Is Perfect:**

"Do you want a boy or a girl?" When asked this question, many soon to be parents answer "we don't care as long as the baby is healthy."

Unfortunately all children are not born healthy and when a couple is faced with a seriously ill child, it affects different marriages in different ways. Some grow stronger while some fall apart.

I turn again to my reader, Kathi. In 1975, she married a wonderful man who not only fell in love with her, but also committed to love and raise her 18 month old daughter. In 1977, they joyfully welcomed their son into the world, but very soon it was clear all was not well with their new baby.

He was diagnosed with a very serious illness and was admitted to a medical center specializing in treating serious conditions in children. The center was 45 minutes from their home. Kathi, of course was torn between being with her son and also caring for her then 4 year old daughter. Her husband did a great job of continuing to work full time, and then driving their daughter to the medical center to see her mom. He had to take on a lot of the household duties as well as being scared to death, his son might not make it.

Kathi, a woman of great faith in God, never gave up hope that her son would recover and live a normal life, but she did comment that it was very hard on the marriage. She and her husband handled their son's illness differently and it was hard for them to talk about it.

Thankfully, their son did survive and is a happy, healthy young man today. The true beauty of Kathi's story, is that her marriage also survived and became stronger. The ability of this couple, very early in their marriage to be able to work together to keep the family a unit while going through the heartache of having a seriously ill infant is a testament to their commitment to one another and their family. She and her husband are celebrating their 39th wedding anniversary this year.

Sadly, it does not always work that way and sometimes a seriously ill child can break a marriage. What I have learned from my research is that in many cases when a marriage dissolves "because" of a sick child, there were already issues in the marriage that were simply exacerbated by the stress of having a seriously ill child.

## **Raising Grandchildren:**

Your children are raised, they get married themselves and have children of their own. You and your spouse finally have your home back and it is all about the two of you again until..... something goes wrong and you find yourself raising young children again at an age you expected to be relaxing and enjoying retirement.

For some marriages this can actually be very positive. One reader shared that she and her husband married when both had already had children and therefore, had no children of their own. Due to unexpected circumstances, they are now raising their two grandchildren together.

She reports that she and her husband had hit some rocky spots in their marriage but now raising these two children has made her marriage stronger and that they feel like it is a new beginning, having these beautiful children to take care of. They are more in synch now that they have their grandchildren's best interests to look after..

Some couples report having a stronger bond with their grandchildren when they live with them than they would have if they only saw them sporadically.

Others say it is hard when an adult child moves back home with his/her child. It is hard to draw the line between grandparent and parent. One reader commented that she bundled her granddaughter up so tight one day that the child was sweating like she was in a sauna because she felt her daughter was not dressing the child warmly enough.

This same reader however did say she made a serious effort to "bite her tongue" and allow her daughter to parent her child.

Does not always work out that way. When my grandmother was widowed, my mother and father moved in with her and shortly after I was born my parents divorced. My grandmother decided the second I was under her roof that she was in control of my upbringing. She also decided that my mother was also under her rules and basically wanted to control every aspect of both our lives. It made for a very unhappy childhood for me and put a lot of stress on my mother, who was trying to raise me while working full time and supporting both me and my grandmother. It also destroyed all chances of my having a loving, nurturing relationship with my grandmother.

From my research, having grandchildren in the house can be a beautiful experience. It can make older married couples relive the fun of having small children around again, even keep them younger and healthier.

Those who do it successfully work very hard not to blur the line between grandparent and parent. They also make sure that having adult children and grandchildren in the house to not take away from their own marriage and time together.

### **The Decision To Never Have Children:**

I am going to start by taking this one. The night I met my husband, he asked first if he could buy me a drink and second question was, "do you have kids?"

Interesting for a chance encounter in a bar but later he told me if I had said I had even one child, he would have walked away. My husband knew at age 27 that he never wanted kids and he was looking for a woman who felt the same. He hit pay dirt with me! I also, after a very near death experience with a pregnancy at age 25, decided I never wanted children. We were meant for each other.

My readers who participated in this blog who have no children are all very happy with their decision even though many of them had some hurdles to cross to be recognized as Child Free.

They love the fact that they can enjoy the person they married. Go out at the spur of the moment and not need a baby sitter. Not having to worry about school districts when choosing a home to buy. Being able to go on vacations that don't include Disney characters or child friendly hotels. They have more money to spend on themselves, private time and read books without pictures in them.

Many child free couples reported that they have lost long time friendships when those friends started having children and they no longer had anything in common with them. That people with children seem to only want to talk about their kids and have no

interest in the Child Free couples life.

Many adults with children decline invitations to anything that does not include their children and can sometimes get nasty when told their children are not invited to an event. For some reason they think that children should be accepted everywhere and that anyone who loves the adults should automatically accept their children.

My readers who know they never want children are very comfortable and happy with that decision but they had to face family members, friends and even medical professionals in order to be able to live by their choice to be Child Free.

We go back to those marriage vows and how in our society, most people see marriage as a first step and having children the natural next step after marriage.

My husband and I were married less than a day when people started asking us if we were going to have children. Most of them knew that we had decided long before we married to never have children, but they asked anyway. They assumed the fact we were legal now, would change our minds.

Society, even in 2014, assumes that every woman dreams of becoming a mother. This makes them treat women who say 'NO' to childbirth as mentally ill, or they tell us we WILL change our minds, and some of our families only care about having grand children or little "mini us" to carry on a name.

We saw the Supreme Court of the United states hear arguments about legalizing Gay marriage and the main argument made was that Gay people can not procreate and therefore their marriages can never be defined as "marriage" because they can never have children naturally.

This was an insult to me and all the other straight people who have married legally with the intention of NEVER having children. Those who are married and physically can not have children "naturally." This argument seemed to make our marriages illegal as well.

To me, marriage is between two people who love each other and what they do with their lives after they marry is their business. No one who falls in love and gets married should feel pressure to have children to be "**normal**" or fit in with society's expectations of what a marriage is.

For those of us who choose to be child free, our decisions should never be questioned just like those who have children don't appreciate their decisions being questioned.

The decision to have children should be a personal one. Not one made by family, friends, medical professionals or government. Not made by a Priest or any religious entity.

The people who make the extremely important decision to procreate should be the two people who having children will affect the most. The people who will be responsible for raising the child..

Does having children affect marriage? It sure does! It puts pressures on it; financial, emotional and even physical. Some marriages can handle it, some can't. The true

beauty is knowing and accepting and then making the decision that is right for YOUR marriage.

The wonderful part about those who choose to have children is most are happy and feel blessed to have made the decision to have them and for those who choose not to have children, are equally happy and content with their decision.

At the end of the day, the most important thing, where children are concerned, is to have a choice and to make the right choice; for the children and for your marriage.

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