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HL | Uncommon Sense

Choosing not to have children

Why it's OK and how to deal with people's reactions

Beth Firestein
Licensed therapist

Question: Dr. Firestein, I'm married and I often get asked when we are going to start a family. How do I explain to people that I love children, but they are not for me? My husband and I agree on this issue, but other people keep bugging us about it.

Answer: There is still a strong cultural expectation that every married couple will have children and usually more than one child. Couples without children are assumed to be either waiting for the right time to have a child, infertile or selfish. And as you mentioned, it is also often presumed that you must not like children if you don't want to have children of your own.

There are many reasons that a couple might choose not to have children. Sometimes these reasons change over time leading to a new decision and many times they do not. Some people decide not to have children because there are certain genetic problems that run in their family and they do not want to take the chance of having a child to whom they may pass on these genetic problems. Or the parents themselves may have serious health problems of their own, limiting their ability to deal with the needs of a child.

Sometimes people decide not to have a child because they don't feel that they have the resources (financial, emotional, time, or otherwise) to give a child all that she or he truly deserves. Sometimes couples decide not to have children because one or the other of the couple feels strongly that they do not want a child. And frequently, in second marriages, children already come with the package and the parents and step-parents already have their hands full.

Choosing not to have children for whatever reason is

Choosing not to have children certainly doesn't mean that you don't love children.

