

definitely a valid choice and one that society is starting to recognize as valid. Childless couples are also "child-free" and have time to work, volunteer and nurture each other and their own health and talents. Choosing not to have children certainly doesn't mean that you don't love children. Many people have very fulfilling and intimate relationships with nieces, nephews and other people's children or work with children as part of their job or profession.

Although you are always free to share your reasons not to have children with curious friends and relatives, your reasons are personal and no explanation is required. A kind smile and the response "I love children, but they are not for me" is perfectly adequate.

Question: My Dad was never around when I was little and now in his older age he says sentimental things about how much he loves me and how proud of me he is. While this is nice, it makes me feel uncomfortable because it's a big shift. How do I deal with this?

Answer: This is a difficult situation for an adult child in your position. Many people carry feelings of hurt, anger and resentment forward from childhood, especially when they feel that one or both of their parents were not very present

during their growing up years. Whether the absence was due to your father's demanding work involvement, alcoholism or just not knowing how to be a good father, his absence may impact the depth and type of hurt you carry.

Regardless of the reason for his absence, it is certainly possible that he now recognizes how valuable you are as a person and as a daughter. He may have always felt this way but been unable to express it or perhaps the recognition has come late — only after he has gotten older and gained perspective. I'm guessing that you have some pain and disappointment from the past that makes it feel awkward or even irritated to be receiving this attention now. You may even wonder if it is real or just for show.

If you have never had a chance to face and deal with the pain and disappointment you feel about his absence in your childhood, it would certainly be helpful to do that now. It is never too late to complete our unfinished emotional business with our parents. It gives us insight about ourselves and gives us the chance to

increase our sense of personal peace and happiness. Once you have dealt with the past, dealing with his approach to you in the present will be easier.

It is up to you whether you want to allow these positive messages from him into your heart and whether you decide to believe that they are true expressions of his feelings. If you want to work on accepting the big shift in the relationship, it could be very positive and healing for both you and your dad. You may choose to address issues of the past with him to clear the air, or it may be easier and more appropriate just to move forward with the new relationship. Either way, I am glad that your father is finally able to express his appreciation for you, and it seems like a step toward a potentially more rewarding relationship.



UNCOMMON SENSE WITH BETH FIRESTEIN

Dr. Beth Firestein is a licensed psychologist. She has 24 years of therapy experience and has practiced in Loveland for over 14 years. She may be reached by calling her office at 970-635-9116, via e-mail at firewom@webaccess.net, or by visiting www.bethfirestein.com.



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