



Raising a child can bring parents to the height of joy and the depths of despair. How can such an innocent, cuddly baby have the power to change our lives and provoke such emotional extremes? Because you love. You love your children and want the best for them. Their accomplishments bring you pride. Their hurts make your heart ache. Their mistakes bring you frustration and the temptation to rescue them.

Once you've met the basic family needs, often your child will benefit from your presence at home even if it means cutting back on work hours or taking a less stressful job.

So what prompts a couple to be willing to undertake the daunting and risky job of becoming a parent? For some it is just what they always expected to do. Isn't that what life is about? You grow up, get married, and have children. For others, they just love babies (and hopefully young people in general). For many, it's a gradual awareness that pulls you to expand this wonderful love you have for each other to create new human beings. You are mystified by the miracle of a new human sharing your DNA, your home, and your future. What will this new creation look like? What traits of each of you will he or she possess?

As momentous and all consuming as parenting a child can be, it may sound counterintuitive to suggest that the child does not come first in a married couple's life- the marriage does.

Yes, a child usually takes more time out of your life for direct care. Yes, a child's needs are often urgent and immediate and parents must sacrifice comfort, sleep, or plans to respond to the child first. But, the bottom line is that if the marriage is not working, it has a profound impact on any children born to it. If you can stay attentive to your marriage, the children will reap the benefits in time. As Fr. Theodore Hesburgh, former president of Notre Dame University, used to say, "The most important thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother."

So what happens when children become a source of difficulty in a marriage? It could be a sick child that requires extra care borrowed from couple time and energy. It could be worries over your child's path in life. It could be disagreements about ways to discipline your child. It could be many things and usually is.

Following are some rules of thumb for the most common issues that parents face in raising children:

### **Balancing children's needs vs spouse's needs**

It's normal and necessary for parents to respond to their children's urgent physical, emotional, and educational needs. This usually takes more hours of the day than time devoted to relating to your spouse. To keep your spouse a priority, however, family life educators recommend:

- daily affirmations (words, hugs, kisses)
- a weekly date
- an annual get-away (without the children)

Some of these require getting a baby sitter (or having family or generous friends) but think of the cost as marriage insurance.

### **Dealing with worries about children**

Worrying and fretting about your children come with the job and can prompt needed action. Some parents, however, "over worry" and become "helicopter parents," hovering over their children. Remember, you are responsible for the process you use in raising your children- not the outcome. When all else fails (and hopefully before) turn it over to God.

### **Disciplining children**

Even parents who have read all the books about childrearing, attend lectures, and love their children with all their hearts will at times differ on how to discipline their children in a specific instance. Ideally, parents will agree beforehand on standard consequences for misbehavior, but when one parent gives a discipline that the other thinks is inappropriate (too harsh or too lenient) it's best for the second parent not to contradict the first. Mother and father should then discuss their differences privately. If the first parent agrees to change, that parent then goes back to the child and informs him or her of the change.

All reputable family life professionals agree that corporal punishment (spanking, hitting, etc.) is no longer acceptable as a way to discipline children. Society has learned better, safer, and more effective ways to discipline. Take a parenting class if you need help.

### **How much money does it take to raise a child?**

More than you thought but less than stores would have you believe. Children can thrive without the latest fads, technology, and baby paraphernalia. Go for sturdy, safe, creative child purchases. Children need your presence more than your presents.

## **Balancing work and family**

Although responsible parents obviously need an income, how much is enough? Once you've met the basic family needs, often your child will benefit from your presence at home even if it means cutting back on work hours or taking a less stressful job. If you're missing more family dinners than you make in a week, that can be a warning sign to readjust your schedule and priorities.