

The Dilemmas of Older First-time Parents: Where Do We Fit In?

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Are you having your first child in your 30's or 40's? Welcome, you are not alone even though it may seem like you are. There are two generations, the 20 somethings, and the 30 and 40s starting families, or growing them larger.

Sitting in the waiting room at your OBs office, you might see the 20-somethings in snug fitting clothes, proudly displaying their baby bumps. From the barely noticeable to those who are ready to pop, you are there alongside them. Are you feeling self-conscious, dressed in your business casual, alone or with your partner? Is it your style, to show or to conceal?

Many women invested in their careers question, how will others view them, and their pregnancy. Will others assume this was planned or a big mistake? They often wonder if they will be taken seriously in their leadership roles, and if having a baby will interfere with the advancement of their careers. For this reason, many women and their partners have waited it out until she is on solid ground. At the same time, couples may be apprehensive about how the corporate world will react, and if she may be subject to others seeing this as limitations to her career.

Today, the Journey to Parenthood takes more divergent paths than ever before. Assisted fertility and diagnostic prenatal and genetic testing has given couples more options well into the later years. The old saying "the clock is ticking" has now been extended beyond the old high-risk pregnancy marker of 35. Increasingly more

common, many couples today are reconsidering decisions made earlier about "to have, or not have" children. After spending many years together focused on career advancement, and enjoying the freedom to get up and go, travel, and enjoy recreational activities, partners may question their earlier decision.

During the reconsideration phase, a significant issue is, are we, or can we get on the same page?" If an agreement is reached to proceed in trying to conceive, there may be many emotional and relational issues that are unresolved. A common scenario is, acquiescing, to not deprive one's partner of a life changing or fulfilling opportunity, and to not be responsible for taking this option away. Unaddressed, suppressed feelings are more likely to become problematic later, and can get in the way of both parents being fully involved in parenting.

Fertility issues are an added stress, concerns about being able to conceive or not, and whether to let nature determine the course, or to proceed involving a specialist. Understanding age may increase challenges may not be sufficient to asway issues of self-esteem and feelings of inadequacy that what is supposed to happen naturally isn't happening. When intrusive medical procedures become part of baby-making, the loving conception can feel remote, and more like an engineered process.

When fertility hormones are part of the prescription, emotional changes are par for the course, and the mood swings can affect couples' confidence about if this was the right decision. Couples may experience challenges in supporting each other on this rollercoaster ride, and particularly if irritability and arguments are on the rise. They may be surprised that after years of individual pursuits their hoped for coming closer together may seem further away. Will

one partner fall in love with their child while the other checks out?

At the day care parents see other parents, the early bloomers, in their 20s, and the later bloomers, in their 30s and 40s. Do we interact, our children are in the same room, and yet our concerns may be similar or worlds apart?

Children starting school are generally all the same age; however, parents may span a generation or more. Perhaps there are more commonalities than may first seem apparent, two working parents, or is there one stay-at-home parent able to be present in a variety of ways. “The first day of school” or a “continuation ceremony” is the same for parents regardless of their age, and the pride felt about their child’s accomplishments. Can you accept that the parents of school-age children are a diverse population, and support your child, too, in knowing this is all okay.

In social or religious circles, couples or families with young children groupings, the second-generation parents sometimes feel out of place. Let’s face it, years of life experience does change our perspective on many things i.e., what is or isn’t a big deal. Ideas and interests as well as opportunities may differ, and potentially be obstacles in relating to each other.

Whether you are starting on the Parenting Journey earlier or later, there will be many challenges ahead. The advantages of starting later is you have years of practice, discovering that what may have seemed insurmountable in the past, you have found ways to master. Your beliefs about yourself as a parent, and the perspective you choose to take will affect your child’s perception of himself and his family. Embrace your Parenting Journey, let go of comparisons, and experience being present in the moment!

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- Acceptance of yourself, your partner, and your challenges
- Embrace and support each other on your journey
- Know the strengths of being an older first-time parent
- Value the paths you have chosen, and your accomplishments
- Appreciate your differences, and value your experiences - these are uniquely yours

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