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Couples Considering Parenthood¹

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Are You Both Ready?



Deciding to have children is a milestone in a couple's life together. Parenthood is a demanding job. Children take time and energy,

leaving a couple with less to give to each other. Both partners need to make sure they are ready for this challenge. Believe it or not, having a child is a much bigger step than getting married. So, before having children, you and your spouse need to develop a solid relationship with one another. A solid relationship is not established overnight: it takes effort, commitment and a lot of patience. Through open communication and sincerity you will be on your way to strengthening your family structure.

In any marriage, the decision of whether or not to have children is as important a decision as you two will ever make. Remember this: if the relationship between you and your spouse is not strong, the chances for your having a successful family *with children* are slim.

Check the Activity Sheet

At the end of this publication is an Activity Sheet for you and your spouse to use to determine how well children fit into your lifestyle. Parenthood is a serious, long-term commitment. To avoid mis-communication later on, it is essential that you and your spouse discuss any concerns either of you have. The information in this activity will help you start exploring some of these issues. Best wishes on your journey!



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Parents Forever

Once a couple has developed a stable relationship, children are a wonderful addition to the family. Parents will be called upon to perform a variety of roles during a child's lifetime.

These roles include care-giver (infant), protector (toddler), nurturer (pre-schooler), encourager (school age) and counselor (adolescent).

As parents you need to have an understanding of how children develop. Knowing child development principles will help prepare you for

the challenging and rewarding life as a parent.

As you know, there is no instruction manual for parents. So, before having a child, it is recommended you take advantage of the different

resources available to help you become better parents. You will find it beneficial to read about different child-rearing practices and attend parenting workshops. Contact your local Cooperative Extension Service office to find out when parenting classes are being held--or for additional resources. Following are some guidelines for the many roles you will play on your journey to becoming an effective parent.



Tips for Potential Parents

The following tips are divided into the developmental stages children face. Read them over to get a general idea of what is important to know at each stage of a child's life.

Infant. Your primary role is that of caregiver.

- Establish a sense of trust in your infant when you respond to his or her needs.
- Always hold your infant when feeding; be sure to smile and interact with him or her.
- Never shake a baby. Always handle your baby with tender loving care.
- Listen to and “talk” with your infant (imitate his or her cooing and babbling).
- Hold, cuddle, stroke, and rock your baby.



Toddler. Your primary role is that of protector.

- Childproof your home and yard. Toddlers are curious and explore everything.
- Give your child choices. This is the stage when a child starts developing a strong sense of self and independence.
- When making requests keep them simple, clear, consistent.
- Be patient. Don't expect your child to share toys. Duplicate toys to reduce conflict with other children.
- The child may exhibit temper tantrums. This is normal. (For more about tantrums, see “Let’s Talk about Temper Tantrums.” FCS 2153 [Ferrer & McCrea 2000]).



Preschoolers. Your primary role is that of nurturer.

- Demonstrate warmth, acceptance, and respect for your child.
- Establish clear rules and limits.
- Provide materials that encourage fantasy play. Children learn best through play.
- Be patient. Children have a lot of questions at this age. Be sure to take time to answer them.
- Acknowledge your child's feelings and communicate acceptance.

School-age. Your primary role is that of encourager.

- Be consistent. Set clear rules and consequences.
- Be supportive. Your child will experience peer influence and pressure. Be available as your child tries to find his or her own identity.



- Provide chances for your child to succeed at a variety of experiences.
- Give guidance and encouragement as your child selects his own activities.
- Give praise for any effort or improvement. Don't criticize.

Adolescent. Your primary role is that of counselor.

- Be warm and accepting. Learn to "let go" as your child gains a greater sense of independence.
- Be a good listener. Consider your teen's opinions, ideas.
- Set clear rules and limits.

- Recognize the physical and emotional changes your adolescent is going through.
- Be interested and involved in your teen's activities without being overly intrusive.

Reference List

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Activity Sheet: Questions for Potential Parents

**Consider the following. There are no right or wrong answers, only what you honestly feel.
When you are both done, share your responses with each other.**

1. How many children would you like to have?

2. Describe the changes having children would bring to your lifestyle.

3. What are your views on discipline?

4. What will you do to establish a strong relationship with your children?

5. List what you feel the best reasons are for becoming a parent.

6. What are the qualities a person needs to have to be a good parent?

7. What are your greatest concerns about becoming a parent?