

Facing the fears of parenthood

Deciding to have a baby is a key milestone in a couple's life. For some it comes as a natural progression in their relationship, while for others it is complicated.

It's wonderful when couples have been together for a while and both share the view that children are important to them because, in this case, having a baby becomes an issue of timing – a “when” rather than an “if”.

Making the joint decision is easier if both people share the same desire and can talk about it.

However, we don't live in an ideal world and many people have fears and worries about the decision to have children. People have been worrying for centuries about bringing children into an increasingly dangerous world. So the worry about “what sort of world is it in which to bring up a child?” is not new.

With this concern, and many others, the bottom line is that experiencing some fears about having children is normal.

Men who are new to the idea of parenthood may worry about how having a child will affect personal freedom.

He may be concerned about what additional responsibilities it will involve. What will be the new pressures on him caused by bringing a new life into the world?

If a man had a cold and distant relationship with his own father, he may feel inadequate about his ability to be a good father. He may feel he will only be seen as a meal ticket, instead of as a person who has something of emotional value to contribute to another human being.

Some men may be worried about what will happen to them if the relationship fails and there are children involved – the concern about losing out emotionally and financially can be very real.

One of our basic instincts is to create, and the birth experience is an extraordinary one for woman and men.

Extending the couple's relationship by creating another being is the most fundamental act of partnership two people can experience.

While motherhood may be a natural thing for most women, a female has her own worries about taking on this role.

There is so much fantasy around parenthood that the process of having a baby can seem daunting.

The notion of the 24-hour day that revolves around a young baby (no regular lunch breaks, coffee breaks or knock-off-at-five times with this job), and how the former career high-flyer will cope with this change of role is a real fear.

Many women are concerned about their body image, worrying about what is going to happen and how they will cope with a body that will have massive changes during pregnancy.

Women may also worry about whether they will lose their individual identities in the motherhood process – going from being a career woman to a mother is a big jump.

Women often fear the physical pain of childbirth and the isolation that being at home with a baby can involve.

While an image of motherhood is created as a time of bliss, this is not always the case, as women struggle with fatigue and not being able to understand or settle the baby.

If the idea of parenthood seems daunting, be reassured that it is normal to have fears.

It is not fashionable to admit to them, but feeling apprehensive about deciding to have children is not unusual.

What is important is that a couple share the fears and don't let them stop embarking on the important life decision.

Making that decision to create a child will certainly change your life, but it will bring you great joy as well.

Survival tips

- It is normal for both sexes to have fears about deciding to have a baby
- Talk to each other openly and share those fears
- If it is too difficult, seek some help from an experienced couple counsellor.