

# Planning Pregnancy: Are you ready for a baby?

## Questions to ask yourself.

By Janelle Durham, Birth Educator, Parent Trust for Washington Children. [www.transitiontoparenthood.com](http://www.transitiontoparenthood.com)

Many babies enter their parents' lives as an unexpected surprise – sometimes welcomed, sometimes not. But, if you're not yet pregnant, just considering a pregnancy, you have the opportunity for a serious discussion with your partner (or serious introspection if you're considering parenting solo) before you start on this journey. Here are some questions to consider. Please do not feel like you have to say yes to all these questions before having a baby! If that was true, we might never make the choice...

**Do you want a child?** Do you really want a child to be part of every day of your life for the next 18 years? Will it be fun? Do you like doing child-focused activities with kids? Would you enjoy having a young child around all the time? Are you patient enough to deal with the noise, chaos, and 24 hour a day responsibility of parenting? Are you looking forward to seeing what kind of person your child will become? Do you enjoy teaching and guiding others? Did you enjoy your own childhood?

**Are you both equally committed to becoming parents?** If only one partner is ready for a baby, then you as a couple aren't ready yet! Parenting will take a lot of work from both of you, and lots of mutual support. [Note: if you plan to single parent, then you should explore whether your support people are committed to helping you when you need them.]

**Health of your relationship:** Do you bicker constantly? Often fail to see eye to eye? Quarrel over housework and getting the things done that need to be done? Have you learned positive ways for working out conflicts? Do you trust, respect, and love your partner? Are you ready to share your partner and give up lots of couple time and intimacy?

**Compatible parenting values:** If you have different religious beliefs, have you discussed how you will handle them with your child? Do you have similar perspectives on discipline? On education? Do you have compatible views about how you will divide up parenting and household responsibilities after baby?

**Community of support:** How well do you get along with your parents? Do you have other friends or family around who would support you with parenting? Do you know other parents you could go to for advice? Are there good resources for parents in your community?

**Environment:** Is the house, neighborhood, and community where you live now the place where you want to raise your child? How will you take care of your child's health and safety? Are your work and home environment (and your partner's) safe from environmental hazards that could harm baby?

**Health and Healthy Lifestyle:** Are you both in good health? Are you at a healthy weight? Are you ready and willing to make healthy changes in your lifestyle, such as improving your diet, exercising, giving up smoking and drug use, and limiting alcohol consumption?

**Finances:** Examine your current income and what your income may be after baby. On that income can you afford all the baby-related expenses like diapers, clothes, carseats, and child care? Do you have health insurance that will cover prenatal care and birth? Will you be able to take time off from your work around the birth? Do you have life insurance, long-term disability insurance, and a will? Do you have debts that you could pay off before baby?

**Crisis management:** How do you manage your temper and high-stress situations? How well do you control your emotions when you're tired? Can you provide consistent, reliable parenting even when you're having a bad day?

**Career Goals:** What do you want out of your life? Could you handle a child and a job or school at the same time? Will having a child at this time block you from achieving your goals, and if so, would you resent that?

**What would you have to give up?** Are you ready to give up the freedom to do what you want when you want? Would you resent losing your free time and privacy? Are you ready to give up sleeping in on weekends? Will it change your relationships with friends? Will it change your finances, and thus the lifestyle you're used to being able to afford?

**Are you choosing to have a baby for the wrong reasons?** Here are some poor reasons for choosing to have a baby. People who chose parenthood for these reasons often regret that further down the road when they didn't get the results they had hoped for. You may want to re-consider pregnancy if any of these describe your motivation for having a baby:

- Everyone else is doing it.
- You hope it will "fix" your relationship.
- You hope it will help your partner become a nicer person.
- Because it might help you give up your bad habits.
- Because your biological clock is ticking and you feel like it's now or never.
- Because your family is pressuring you.
- To prove that you can be a better parent than your parents were.
- You want a child because you want someone to love you and make you happy.

**Are you NOT choosing to have a baby for the wrong reasons?** Just as some people may jump into parenting too quickly without enough forethought, some people may delay for longer than they need to because they just can't stop thinking it through. Some couples have a hard time moving past these questions, and deciding to take the plunge into parenthood. They continue to find more reasons why "now is not a good time to have a baby." Things like "Well, once I finish that project at work..." or "Once we've bought a house..."

If you're feeling bogged down, or paralyzed by indecision, fear, or anxieties about parenting, it's important to realize that there's never a *perfect* time to have a baby. Sometimes it just requires a leap of faith – a willingness to surrender control and trust that it will work out.

If one member of a couple is feeling ready, and the other isn't, it's worth asking each other what fears are holding you back, and then deciding whether they are fears that can be resolved, or whether this leap of faith is the only way through.

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**Making a plan:** As you discuss these questions, and explore them together and on your own, you will begin to get a picture of whether now is the right time for you to have a baby. If there are areas that challenge you, think about whether they are things that will change if you wait a while, or would improve if you sought counseling or support, or if they are things that may never change. If they'll never change, ask yourself if that will be OK. This thought process can help you make a plan for steps you would like to take before beginning a pregnancy.

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### **Pre-Conception Health:**

Once you've made the decision to get pregnant, seek out advice on pre-conception health: nutrition and lifestyle choices you can make which increase your fertility and improve the health of the pregnancy and of the baby.

You can even start all these healthy habits while you're still trying to decide if you're ready for a baby – they're all good for you no matter whether or not you decide to get pregnant soon!