

I GUESS I'M A DAD NOW:

A HUMOROUS HANDBOOK FOR NEWISH
DADS WHO DON'T WANT TO SUCK



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Chapter 1

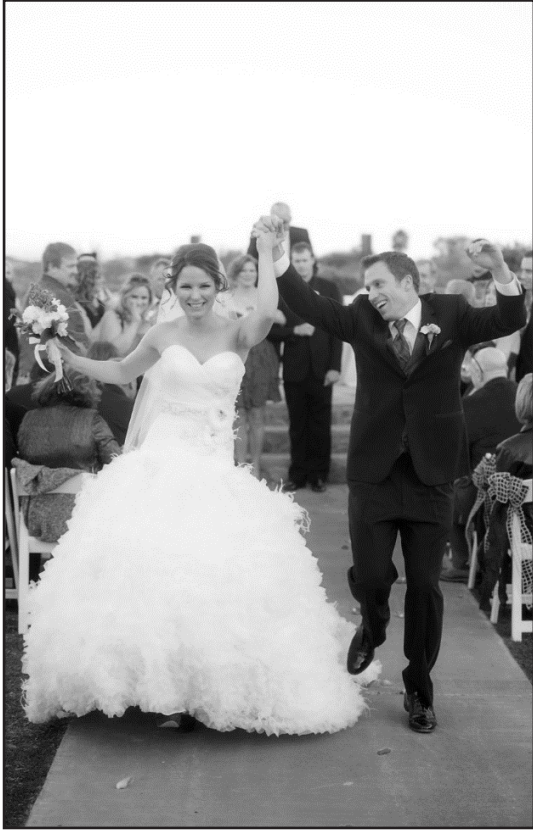
To Breed or Not to Breed? That Is the Question



Perhaps this book has gotten into your hands before it's too late. I mean, before you decided to take the joyful, never hard, and always rewarding step of becoming a parent. And maybe you are on the fence about having kids. The fact that you are even putting some thought into dadding and reading a book shows you have enough introspection to make the right choice for you.

And that last word is the most key: *you*. The choice has to be right for you. Now when I say "you," I mean the "royal you" and whoever will let you fornicate with them. For a very long time, my wife and I did not want kids. She

was in graduate school. I was enjoying the free time and hobbies that had eluded me through pharmacy school and residency. But even once my wife was out of grad school, living that DINK life was sweet!



*Cassie and I on our wedding day, January 3rd, 2014.
A good four years before kids. So happy. So free. So
clueless.*

Even on our honeymoon to Maui, we met a couple in their 40s with no kids who were living a great life. They had several nieces and nephews, a full bank account,

and zero regrets. As my wife started feeling the tingles and jingles in her empty uterus, I tried to remind her of the couple from Maui. How happy they seemed. How relaxed. How...free.

If you can't tell, I was not quite as ready to create human life as my wife was. So I cut her a pretty awesome deal: if the Cubs won the World Series, we could try and have kids. It had been 108 years since they had been able to pull it off, and they were historically inept. I thought that my freedom, sanity, and money were safe.

Let's just say there were more than just tears of joy when they won it all in 2016.

Alright, my kids might read this someday and think I didn't want them. That's not true. I just wanted to ensure a very statistically low chance that we'd have them. (If you are reading, kids, I'd pay for your therapy, but you already took my prime years and money away from me. If you want to fix whatever issues you have, it's up to you to pay for it.)

Sorry, back to the reasons to (or not to) have kids. As my wife and I were starting to see our friends procreate, there began to come some, how do I say this nicely, pressure. It came from friends, from family, and from society at large. Below, I will list some of the reasons that people "think" they should have kids. I'll explain why it's a terrible list shortly:

- "We want grandkids!"
- "Babies are so cute."
- "It's sooooo rewarding."
- "Maybe it will fix whatever is wrong in our

relationship?”

- “It will help us focus on those habits we need to change.”

If I missed other “reasons” that people have given you to have kids, please let me know (preferably not in an angry, but rather, kind email or review), and I will throw them in the next edition. And I will give YOU the credit! Helping other dads and getting famous, ...how’s that for a deal?

In reality, I want to explain to you the problems that having kids solve and the ones that having kids don’t solve to better guide you toward your decision.

Here are the problems having kids solve: not having kids.

Here are the problems kids don’t solve: everything else.

The problem they do solve is pretty self-explanatory, so let’s dive into what creating little humans *doesn’t* solve.

“We want grandkids!”

Oh, your parents and possibly in-laws have had an empty nest for too long. They want to know that their decision to have you and your “kid-havin’ partner” will result in a genetic victory for them by having their DNA passed down to another generation. Plus, all of *their* friends’ kids have already had kids and made them grandparents. And they don’t want to be the only ones without those precious grandkids.

I admit that both my parents and in-laws are very loving with our kids. And we are lucky enough to live in the

same city, so they get to be a part of their grandkids' lives a lot. For that, we and our kids are grateful and fortunate. However...

Remember who will take care of your kids when they are up sick in the middle of the night. Or throwing a tantrum while refusing to get in the car to go to school. Or who insists you buy them more of that slightly more expensive version of food because they "love it," only to refuse it the next day. Or who gets featured on the news when their kids become a Russian asset and start selling military secrets while selling out Uncle Sam.

You will be. Not the grandparents.

While, if you are lucky, they will be a wonderful and possibly helpful part of your kids' lives, it is still you on the hook for it. And take heed of what happened to me. For years, my mother, in all her Jewish guilt, kept asking if we were going to change our minds about kids. Eventually, the asking became nagging, and then, thanks to a Ben Zobrist 10th-inning single and my deal with my wife: we had our first son. She was happy. We were, too, but also, we were handling the lion's share of the "raising kids" part.

Fast forward to a few years later, and we explained to her we were contemplating an unprecedented third kid. Instead of the "I need grandkids" excitement from years earlier, the reaction was, "You are already pretty tired. Are you sure you can handle another?"

Um, thanks for the advice?

Having kids for the sake of your parents is kind of like giving your kids exactly what they ask for. At first, they'll love you and be excited, but then, the shine of any new

thing wears off. Even grandkids, apparently.⁶

Ultimately, having kids should be about satisfying *your* own desire to pass on your DNA, not anyone else's, not even your parents.

“Babies are so cute.”

I won't deny this one, only with the caveat that *some* babies are so cute. Some are decidedly less so. With all due respect and apologies to my second son, Henry, when he came out of his mom, I don't think he was done cooking yet. He really looked more like an alien than a cute human baby. Maybe, it's an unfair comment, considering he earned himself an immediate trip to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit for a day, but the kiddo wasn't that cute out of the uterus. Cut to three months later, and he was well on his way to being a handsome baby lady killer.

Even for those babies that come out of the womb looking fresh, fly, and cute as hell, there are a couple of sobering realities to remember:

- Cuteness will not predict a lack of getting up in the middle of the night to take care of them.
- Cuteness will not keep them from turning into toddlers that melt down, ruin plans, and generally destroy any nice piece of clothing/furniture/automobile you have.
- Cuteness eventually gets a surge of hormones that renders them moody, angry, and obstinate

⁶ *My mother is a wonderful grandmother to our kids, I love her, they love her, and we are grateful for her. And one of the things we love her for is her honesty. And she wasn't lying, I was and am pretty tired. Now I am tired with three kids.*

teenagers.

In short, like adrenaline during a workout, the “Puppy Love” phase of any relationship, and the patience for your in-laws: cuteness eventually wears out. And when it does, you better have a really good reason for having had that “cute” baby, and a lot of “why” you had that “cute” baby, for keeping up with the challenges involved in raising it. Making cute kids is nice and all, but it is not its own reason for having them.

“It’s sooooo rewarding.”

Being a dad can be really rewarding. The first time I saw my oldest son rip a drive off the tee right down the middle was awesome. Or when he came to an improv jam, got on stage, and held his own was great. And just seeing my youngest son throw a baseball with better mechanics than I was able to achieve after years of work warms my heart.

Let me take a moment to highlight one of those, um, highlights. Hitting a golf ball is one of the most *maddeningly*, challenging, athletic endeavors to do well. For us adults, there is too much overthinking, overanalyzing, and for many, too much time over the ball. It was ironic that on my 36th birthday, almost 30 years since I had started swinging a golf club, on a crisp December afternoon, our oldest son, Jake, took one of the freest and easiest swings I had ever seen him take and casually hit it almost 100 yards right down the center. There was no thought, no worry, just the product of many days in the backyard and at the driving range together with my own dad and me. It was a

culmination of hours of practice, fun, and love. And it was prettier than any drive I can remember myself hitting. That he hit it so well wasn't the most rewarding part; rather, it was the time spent together, helping make that moment possible, and getting to share it with my own dad.

That's a pretty sweet scene, right? But on the other hand, there's a lot of shit that is not rewarding at all, so let's not delude ourselves into believing that it's just one long happy-fest.

I'll touch on that later, but at least from my experience, for the first large chunk of my kids' lives, and by "large chunk," I mean it has been "The Mom Show."

Crying? They want Mom.

Hungry? Only Mom can feed them.

Need a diaper changed or a butt wiped? "I WANT MOMMA!"

While this does provide a bit of breathing room for me, it also does put a huge burden on my wife. It also goes to show all of the ways you think you may be there to support your kid(s) in a "rewarding" manner, which may not materialize. I didn't get into the Dad business because I needed to *feel* rewarded or to fill some empty emotional hole in my soul.

And it's best that you do not expect the same.

While I could go into numerous examples of "non-rewarding" scenarios, I know your time is valuable, and I think I have painted enough of a pretty simple, yet effective picture of what it's like. In other words, being a dad *can be rewarding*, the results are not consistent, not guaranteed, nor a reason to have kids in the first place.

“Maybe it will fix whatever is wrong in our relationship?”

Let me start by repeating something I have already explained:

Here are the problems having kids solve: not having kids.

Here are the problems kids don't solve: everything else.

Did you see fixing your relationship on the list of “problems having kids solve?” In case you aren't paying attention, the answer is “No.” I don't mean to be condescending, but this is a really important piece of the kids' puzzle that a lot of people miss. While I am not saying there are *some* couples that do go from a rocky-at-best relationship to a decades-of-wedded-bliss scenario, I am saying it's probably not likely. If you and your lady's relationship is swimming in rough seas, there is one thing you should start with, and it's not having a kid (or several):

Couples therapy, on the other hand, is the fairest thing for the two of you and the poor soul that is possibly going to be conceived by you as well. Don't believe me? Then let's hit our final point.

“It will help us focus on those habits we need to change.”

Anyone who says having kids doesn't change you is

a bald-faced liar.⁷ It should change you, and it will. Like, instead of staying out partying, traveling to exotic locations around the world, or simply going to a movie whenever you feel like it, you stay home while your sick kids watch *Octonauts* for the 50th time. If you don't change, you are probably doing it wrong.

I have found that paradoxically while having kids changes you in *some* ways (i.e., caring more for another human than yourself. RIGHT?!), it also makes you *more* of who you already are.

Are you a big ball of nerves and anxiety? Having a kid will turn that dial up.

Are you a big goofball that will do anything for a laugh? You won't stop with the dad jokes.

Are you a stress eater? Prepare to put on some kid weight because, believe it or not, kids can be stressful at times.

Dadding, if you are doing it right, will be a shock to your life. But it will also fill up so much of your time and energy that making big changes to your habits will prove to be a real challenge. I am not saying it's impossible, but it's certainly not easy. I had grand visions of what it would be like. For example, when my first kid was born, I would become "so inspired" that I would aim to be the best person I could be, and my sad habit of eating entire jars of peanut butter or blocks of cheese in a sitting would

⁷ *Want to learn something else beyond parenting? It's not "bold-faced liar." Impress your kids with this fact, then present shame with a citation when they doth protest too much: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/is-that-lie-bald-faced-or-bold-faced-or-barefaced>*

magically vanish because I would be changed. It turns out that we keep both of these foods for our kids, and they have had to sadly learn to eat fast before Dad leaves them sad and hungry.⁸

Having kids was not enough of a change to change these undesirable habits, among many others. My advice would be to work on yourself as much as possible *before* that kid comes and rocks your world. However, if you are reading this, and it's too late, you still don't get off the hook. You just gotta realize if you wanna change, it's gonna take a helluva lotta effort and energy... and since you have kids, there's less in the tank. Good luck with that. I'll be over here, feverishly trying to get the last semblance of peanut butter out of the jar before my kid wakes up and has the shameful view of me seared into his brain.

Kid Shaming is a Two-Way Street

Imagine for a moment your friends from high school aren't all total losers, and one has found a way to convince someone to marry them. You are at his wedding, sitting at what has turned into an impromptu high school reunion. Despite being the same age, everyone at the table but you have kids, have found a babysitter, but have *not* found a topic to discuss other than their kids.

As your table is waiting for the cake to be served, Craig, the guy who couldn't snag a date in high school and sat alone at home on prom night, turns to you with a crazed

⁸ And by "hungry," I mean only getting to choose from one of the other dozens of delicious and as I will boldly say, healthy offerings our grandparents could have only dreamed about.

look in his eyes and says, “Oh my gosh, I can’t believe you don’t have kids yet!”

Overhearing Craig’s comment, Denise, who was voted “Most Likely to Succeed,” has pretty much lived up to the superlative as she runs the most successful orthodontic practice in your city, chimes in, “I just don’t see the point of life without my kids!”

If that wasn’t enough, Mandy, who was easily the best-looking girl in your class, and the one you never quite worked the nerve to ask out, feels the need to throw her two cents into the conversation and adds, “Kids are just the best; if you don’t have them, you may as well just throw yourself into oncoming traffic because there is just no point to life and you’ll die alone with no one to take care of you!”

Um, maybe it was good that you were chronically shy in high school and never got the full “Mandy Experience.”

These are just three of the most probable reactions from “kid havers” when running into couples who have yet to decide whether or not to totally uproot their current quality of life and add kids to the mix. And let me tell you, as someone who has kids who encounters kidless couples, I would like to tell all the kid shamers out there: keep your sleep-deprived, snot-covered, dirty-diapered thoughts to yourselves.

Just because *you* get no sleep, can’t travel on a whim, and have way less money than before, doesn’t mean you need to be like a crab in a bucket, grabbing anyone else who dares to try escaping the full-on responsibility of having kids. You made your choice, so live with it because

having kids is a big deal (at least if you do it right, it should be), and if someone is not ready, then they sure as hell don't need pressure from you to do it. In fact, add "being shamed" to another reason why not to have kids.

On the other hand, I was at a party, and one of the couples there was talking about their *three* kids, after which my wife and I explained the trials and tribulations of raising our two toddlers, to which the dad said, "It's really not parenting until you have *three*."

Much like the shamer of the kidless couple, to the shamer of the "don't have enough kids" couples, please:

Keep your sleep-deprived, snot-covered, dirty-diapered thoughts to yourselves. We get it; you thrive on the outnumbered side of zone defense and want everyone with kids to suffer as much as you do. Hell, I *have* three kids and can't defend his comment.

I don't know when everyone's business became everyone's business. My guess is sometime around the era when Facebook became not just for college kids because Zuckerberg needed MORE money and power, so he opened it up to everyone, hilariously including our parents in the equation so we could watch them publicly post comments that they believed were private messages. While this was entertaining, unfortunately, it turned the entire culture into a dangerous combination of Nosy Nelly's and narcissists needing an opinion on everything, including your procreation proclivities.

Whether you have no kids, one kid, or a football team's

worth,⁹ that's your choice. My advice is to drown out the kid shamers regardless of what way they cut because if you think that once you have kids, strangers are going to stop commenting on your parenting, you are delusional. Therefore, you may as well gird those loins and practice ignoring the morons early and often.

⁹ *This joke works both internationally for soccer-football, and for here in America, football-football, being truly the only football worth watching. I may be an ugly American, but I am an ugly American that likes to include our international brothers and sisters on top-notch comedy, even if their sport is painfully boring.*

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