

Are you both ready for *children?*

Nappy changes, midnight feeds and lack of sleep are nothing compared with the love you feel for your baby. Yet with parenthood come unique relationship challenges, especially when children aren't on the immediate agenda for one or both of you

Women need to decide what's important to them, what they're willing to compromise on and what's non-negotiable," says relationship counsellor Mary Ovenstone. This is particularly relevant when it comes to having children. If you want kids and your partner doesn't, it's time to reassess your relationship. We speak to two women, one who planned her baby and another who didn't, about the impact it had on their respective relationships.

"Having a baby was always something both of us wanted."

SOULLA FALCONER (28)

"Taking the next step was exciting and just felt right. I'd been on the pill for a few years, so my husband and I thought it would take a while before I fell pregnant. When it happened sooner than we anticipated, we couldn't contain our excitement!

"While we come from very different homes where our parents' child-rearing strategies were universes apart, we share the same moral foundation. Our

religious beliefs have been an essential ingredient in the way we've agreed to raise our daughter. While we may differ on small elements, overall discipline and moral questions are things on which we see eye to eye. We believe that if a couple's about to become parents, it's vital that they discuss their take on parenting first and understand each other's viewpoint.

"Relationships wouldn't be normal if they didn't take strain after the birth of a child. The hardest thing for us has been time. As a mother, I tend to be more sleep-deprived. Unfortunately, being tired comes with a few irritable days and we've had to learn to be more patient with each other. Now that our daughter's older, we've made sure that one night a week she stays over at a grandparent while we get out of the house and have a dinner date.

"Despite the sleepless nights and cranky days, nothing can prepare you for the joy and love you'll feel. Becoming parents is an experience that will take your relationship to a new level and spark a deeper love in your partner than you thought possible. Learning to do the childcare together and include each other is important. Don't let your fear overcome you."

"Our relationship changed based on his reaction to the pregnancy."

THANDIWE* (28)

"I was 18 when I found out I was pregnant. I'd just started studying and it was quite a surprise. The baby's father was young too and he tried to persuade me to have an abortion, but I wasn't willing to do that. We'd been together for four years at that stage.

"Babies make good relationships better and bad ones worse. Your expectations of someone as a parent will be different to how you view them as a partner.

"Our relationship changed based on my boyfriend's reaction to the pregnancy. I felt alone and abandoned, while he wanted to continue partying.




HANDLING RELATIONSHIP CHALLENGES

Ovenstone shares the following tips for handling parenting challenges as a couple:

- 1** Continue to **date once a week**, so you **keep your romance alive**.
- 2** Have a **face-to-face weekly meeting** (not during your date!) to resolve conflicts, discuss finances and **make decisions together**.
- 3** Make **joint financial plans**, with a shared monthly budget, paid for from a **joint banking account** into which you both pay in proportion to your **relative incomes and circumstances**.
- 4** **Begin saving** for school fees, holidays, emergencies and retirement. This money can be divided if you break up.
- 5** Slot sex and **time together into your schedule** so that they're prioritised like all your other activities.

Our priorities changed. I think we both wanted to make it work 'for the baby,' but the reality was that the relationship was too scarred by then. By the time our daughter was two-and-a-half, I realised that if I stayed in the relationship, I'd never be happy – so we split up.

"I believe that a couple can grow stronger through an unexpected pregnancy. It takes maturity, teamwork and dedication and if you both have the same vision, you can make it work. It all depends on the history leading up to the pregnancy and how you both handle the change. Your life will never be the same again and you both need to accept that, embrace it and grow together.

"I married last year and we now have another baby. My husband wanted to feel every kick and wouldn't miss a single scan. I'm not saying a pregnancy is ever easy – we still had to tolerate each other's heightened emotions – but I felt far more secure and when the baby arrived, we could look back and say we got through it. There have been difficult times too, but our relationship isn't fragile and the love that grows from being parents is a blessing all on its own." 

*Not her real name

You say



DESTINY asks its Facebook fans:

Are you keen to have kids, but your partner isn't? How have you handled it?



Mahlako Mabitsi: My partner's keen, but I'm not. Frankly, I don't know if I'll ever want kids. But we're still dating and it's as if he's waiting for me to agree.



Manana Lesetedi: Find out the reason first and if you understand it, then it's all good. If not, in vitro fertilisation with a sperm donor is the solution. You have rights!



Salaminah Banini Mashele: I really struggled to persuade my husband to have a baby. He wanted to wait and I was heartbroken. Alone, I decided to stop taking contraceptives so that if it happened, it happened – but nothing did. Now we both want children and we're struggling.



Denise Bashala: That's one of the reasons I'd leave my partner. I want a family – and a family involves kids!



Chloe Phuti: Having children is one of the important discussions you should have with someone you intend to spend your life with *before* you commit!