

The Third Baby Debate: Hearts Versus Minds

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Many couples sitting at home staring at their two beautiful children are contemplating an important decision... to have — or not to have — that third child. The question pits primal baby hunger against cold hard economic realities. And here's one reality worth considering — raising a third child will cost a cool quarter of a million dollars. Think we're exaggerating? The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates the cost of raising a child at \$10,000 a year for the typical middle-class family. Now multiply that figure by 18 and factor in college and inflation. And remember, that's in addition to providing for the two you already have. And, uh, did we mention *your own retirement*. For many women, the struggle with whether to have a third child is an emotional decision. Just ask Christine D'Amico, author of *The Pregnant Woman's Companion*. "We talked about the **financial** issues, but in the end we just went ahead and did it," she says, speaking of her daughter, Francesca, who is now one. And men? Jeffrey Fishman, a **financial planner** and father of newborn Olivia Rose, his third child, says, "In our office, we call it economic birth control — the decision to have more kids, whether it's a second or third, is clearly an economic one." Both the emotional and the economic considerations are important. But which one is *more* important? **Just the Facts** American birth rates are falling and the average family size is smaller than it was a generation ago. Many factors are cited in the decline, but chief among them are the surging percentage of women in the work force as well as the skyrocketing costs of raising children. No one has to tell working parents with two children that their pocketbooks, not to mention their schedules, will be stretched even further by a third child. But despite the cost, many parents still wrestle with the decision to have more children. Even for the well off, economics are an issue, although not really a real barrier. If, however, you're middle class, adding a third child to the family is going to require some major financial trade-offs. **Initial Costs Aren't Scary** Outside of any extra medical bills you might get hit with from the hospital and your OB-GYN, newborns aren't that expensive. Babies don't need much room, and frequently there are hand-me downs and enough baby equipment left over from the first two to save you from ransacking the nearest Babies R Us. Diapers run about \$1,000 per year until you're finished with toilet training. If you formula feed that can add \$1,000 or more, but just for the first year. And many **health insurance** plans cover all members in the family, regardless of how many children there are.

But for two-income families, once your maternity leave is over, watch out. Day care costs are increasing significantly, averaging around \$7,000 per year per child, according to a study by consulting firm Runzheimer Associates. To get around the child care conundrum, more women are exploring **options** like flex time, telecommuting or self-employment. Working for yourself or working a flexible schedule, either at the office or at home, can allow mothers to work around their children's schedules. Flex time and self-employment have tradeoffs though, because it can mean less income and therefore less discretionary spending. But for moms juggling the schedules involved with three children, sometimes there's little choice. If you're thinking about a third child and want to approach your current employer about a change in your work schedule, do your homework first. "There are many options for women in terms of part-time and flex-time if they are willing to do the work to find such a situation," says D'Amico, who is also a personal coach. "Many of my clients don't think they will be able to get a part-time option within their jobs and so they never ask — but when we set up a plan for them to go and ask for it, many of them are surprised that they can get it." **The High Cost of Growing Up** The expense picture gets trickier as kids enter the school-age years. It doesn't matter that a generation ago, lots of families with three and even four children got by in three-bedroom, two-bathroom homes. Today's families have a different concept of space — that and a whole lot more stuff. Suddenly your house that was fine for a family of four is feeling pinched because two kids now have to share a bedroom, which has led to the inevitable squabbling. And, if one parent is working from home, the issue of smaller quarters is compounded further. Moving and renovating are expensive propositions. "Housing is the single biggest expense," Fishman says. "Housing has gone up so much in many different areas of the country that you need two incomes just to move." And a bigger house doesn't mean just a bigger **mortgage payment** — add higher utility bills, **real estate taxes**, insurance and maintenance costs to your budget. **Stacy Phillips, a family law attorney in Los Angeles, is convinced that despite low inflation numbers, many everyday costs have gone up — and that's in addition to the stratospheric rise in real estate prices in many areas of the country. "Gas prices are really going up, cars are more expensive, and there are extras that are now necessary like computers for homework," she says. "Incomes aren't increasing proportionally. When I grew up more moms stayed home. Now, to maintain the same type of lifestyle, you need two incomes." To buy a larger home in many cities, three incomes might not be enough.**

Some of the strategies for coping are just commonsense: You can keep a lid on school costs by sending your kids to public schools and limiting extra-curricular activities. Buying used cars and holding onto them can keep vehicle costs down, as can carpooling with other parents. If you have a home with a basement that's still unfinished — finish it. There's no faster way to increase the livable space in your house by up to 50%. **Saving for College and Retirement** Two of the biggest wild card costs are saving for your child's college and your own retirement. Like day care costs, college costs are rising faster than inflation. If you want to have a chance of a comfortable retirement, you need to continue to save through your employer and on your own through IRAs and **529 plans**, despite what you're spending on your kids. Although it may seem counter-intuitive, retirement should be a parent's first priority. It's less imperative to save for college than retirement: your kids can get **loans** and scholarships and have a lifetime of earnings ahead of them. You only have a finite amount of time to save. **The Bottom Line** So, can you balance your heart and pocketbook in contemplating a third child? For Phillips, "It's a discussion you need to have together to make sure you're on the same page." She believes couples should give equal weight to economic and emotional decisions. For Fishman, it's a matter of priorities within individual families. "It all comes down to priorities," he says. "If you want to have a large family and you are willing to make the sacrifices to do it, go ahead." These sacrifices can range from staying in a small home to skimping on or actually cutting out vacations, newer cars and dinners out. For D'Amico, it's an emotional issue, but it is possible to gauge whether it's affordable or not by looking at your current situation. "I think you can raise a third child without a lot of extra expense if you have some extra money now in your budget," she says. "But when you start to add things like college, daycare, airplane travel or private schools you will quickly see the impact that having a third child can have on your **financial** life." Like any other major expenditure, contemplating adding to your family means you should take a long, hard look at your budget, your current living situation and the state of your **retirement savings**. But remember, some things are just beyond a price tag; be sure to take a look at your heart, as well. The joy of another child can more than outweigh some financial sacrifices. If you do take the plunge, good luck — and cross your fingers you're not having twins. Amy B. Crane is a freelance writer who lives and invests in Erie, PA.

Forget the supermarket tabloids and all the celebrity-drenched predictions about the year ahead in romance and relationships. We asked social scientists, psychologists, dating coaches, veteran daters, and astrologers to predict trends in the year ahead that the rest of us might actually experience. Here's what they told us. "The quest is to nest!" says **Dr. Gilda Carle**, Ph.D. "People want love and family. Online dating will become even more significant in 2005 as people become more adept in differentiating between mere promises on the computer screen and true and honest souls. People will be seeking answers as to why past relationships didn't work, and how they can become more skilled at relationship partnership. Lots of self-assessment, lots of movement toward growth!" — Dr. Gilda (www.DrGilda.com), a relationship expert and professor of psychology, is the author of "Don't Bet on the Prince!: How to Have the Man You Want by Betting on Yourself" (Golden Books). **Aries (March 21 - April 19)** — You're known for your fire and passion and in 2005, those traits are sure to help you keep things sizzling. Romance may try to put a few twists in the road, but with your irresistible charm and flirty attitude, you won't even notice if things don't go as planned. (www.Astrology.com) "Commitment and domestic bliss" — As the elections showed, we're heading into a more conservative era," says **Tina B. Tessina**, Ph.D. "Commitment and domestic bliss will become much more important. Single people will be searching more for lasting love, less for brief encounters. There is a whole movement boosting marriage, which can help make them more lasting. Online resources create more opportunities, and more problems, such as long-distance dating." — Tessina (www.tinatessina.com), a psychotherapist, is the author of "How To Be a Couple and Still Be Free" (New Page 2002). **Taurus (April 20 - May 20)** — Determined as a bull and romantic as a Parisian in springtime, you're just the right mixture to set hearts thumping. And this year, you'll turn up the heat big-time. You've got an entire year to get romance going your way — and don't worry, it won't take much effort. (www.Astrology.com) "Look for proximity dating," says **Tiffany Shlain**. "If you ever wondered if there was a potential new date standing next to you at a cocktail party, linkage software, appearing on some social networking and dating sites, combined with global positioning software, will be used to enable cell phones to notify you when someone with a matching profile is nearby." — Shlain is founder and creative director of The Webby Awards (www.webbyawards.com), the leading international honors for web sites. "A banner romantic year" **Gemini (May 21 - June 21)** — Free-spirited and extremely intelligent, you make quite the lover. The ups, downs and sideways motions of love in 2005 would be a challenge for most people, but your need for change and new things will guarantee that this is a banner romantic year. Buckle up and enjoy the ride! (www.Astrology.com) "Technology will advance virtual love connections for singles in 2005," says **Liz H. Kelly**. "Daters will be emailing video clips, posting audio greetings online and communicating via video phones to make great first impressions." — Kelly (www.smartmanhunting.com) is a dating coach and the author of "SMART Man Hunting" (Writers Club). **Cancer (June 22 - July 22)** — You may normally enjoy cuddling by the fire, but 2005 could be the year you come out of your cozy shell. You'll still be your nurturing, generous self, but some wild, romantic escapades will awaken your senses and rock your world. Grab your partner and get ready for some fun. (www.Astrology.com) "Stay positive and live in the moment" — "The dating forecast is wide open for you in 2005," says **David Wygant**. "You can achieve whatever your heart desires as long as you stick with two rules. Rule number one forget about everything that happened to you in 2004. The year is new and if you hold onto pain or memories from 2004 you will not be open to meet anyone. Rule number 2, stay positive and live in the moment. Do not try to forecast what will happen — just enjoy what is happening." — Wygant (www.datingsteps.com) is recognized as one of the world's premier dating authorities. **Leo (July 23 - Aug. 22)** — You're king of the hill, and when you see someone you want, you go for them — because it just seems natural that you should get what you want, right? Fortunately, the upcoming year abounds with opportunities for you to do just that. Go for love, and you'll get it. (www.Astrology.com) "Single women are becoming stunningly less determined to find mates/romantic love," says **L.J. McMillan**. "They are learning to savor their female/male friendships, put efforts into careers and interests, and evolve into quite interesting people. They know they will be secure, happy and independent even if they never find that perfect romantic relationship." — McMillan is an attorney, mother, sportswoman and author of the book "It's Not About Men" (1st Books Library) "Take your romance just about anywhere" **Virgo (Aug. 23 - Sep. 22)** — Love cannot be contained, controlled or organized into neat little sections — but if anyone can make love do what they want, it's you. You've got some impressive communication skills, and if you pay attention to what happens in 2005, you could take your romance just about anywhere. (www.Astrology.com) "There are nearly 25 million singles age 50+," says **Tom Blake**. "2005 will be the year they become a force in the seeking- and finding-love arena. Most of them admit, when they became single after years of marriage, they weren't prepared for dating. However, through the Internet, books, newsletters and personal experiences, they are learning the ropes by weeding out the flakes and focusing on the serious contenders. Be prepared for lots of success stories from the older set." — Blake, a Southern California newspaper columnist, offers dating advice at www.findingloveafter50.com. **Libra (Sep. 23 - Oct. 22)** — Ever the social, charming delight, you've got what it takes to make everyone love you — and when you set your sights on someone specific, they won't know what hit 'em. This year starts a bit slow, but you'll have no trouble getting romance back on your side, and quickly. (www.Astrology.com) "More Internet daters in their 50s and 60s" "Divorces continue apace, particularly among baby boomers," says **Aline Zoldbrod**, Ph.D. "Most baby boomers are getting to the point (or past the point) where their kids are independent — a developmental point where many unsatisfying couple relationships dissolve. Ergo, increasing numbers of people in their 50s and 60s are joining Internet dating services. Dating services with names less old-fashioned than 'Senior Finder' will probably evolve to meet the growing needs of this vibrant, still-young age group." — Zoldbrod (www.sexsmart.com) is a certified and licensed sex therapist in the Greater Boston area. **Scorpio (Oct. 23 - Nov. 21)** — You're known for your sexual prowess, but as you know, you've got quite an intellect going as well. In 2005, you'll be using that intellect for romance. Love is a mystery, and your goal is to solve it — and once you do, you'll get all the lovin' you want. (www.Astrology.com) "We're going to see a boom in 'truth in advertising' when it comes to online dating in 2005," says **Karen Berntson**. "Expect to see dating sites taking sophisticated steps to help singles weed out potential bad dates, such as services that verify background information, certify the authenticity of photos, and use personality tests to better match couples." — Berntson is a co-founder of www.noticeyou.com, a professional photo service for online daters. "Flirty, flirty, flirty!" **Sagittarius (Nov. 22 - Dec. 21)** — Flirty, flirty, flirty! Life would be boring without playful, flirtatious souls like you, and you know it. But in 2005, your typically independent self is going to have to get used to thinking of someone else first. And you know what? — It's going to be fun! (www.Astrology.com) "Online dating is mainstream and that means you have to make a good first impression twice, first online and then when you eventually meet in person," says **Arnold Sanow**. "The second one is tricky; you have to live up to the image you've created online, when you had time to think about your responses and when body language did not come into play. In person, you need to establish rapport and build your 'Likeability Quotient.' I tell people to S.O.F.T.E.N. their appearance: Smile, be Open with your body language, Focus on the other person when you speak, respect their Territory (maintain 14" - 4' distance), make Eye contact (look at people in 3-5 second intervals) and Nod to show that you are paying attention." — Sanow (www.getalongwithanyone.com) is co-author of "Get Along with Anyone, Anytime, Anywhere: 8 Keys to Creating Enduring Connections" (Nautilus Communications). **Capricorn (Dec. 22 - Jan. 19)** — Satisfaction guaranteed. That's you. You work hard to make everything the best it can be, including romance — and that continues in 2005. You'll be in your element making sure everything goes smoothly — not only will it, but your hard work will be nicely rewarded by a certain someone. (www.Astrology.com) "Busyness of everyday life" — "Marriages will be on the rise as people become aware that it is more difficult to have children later in life," says **Marilyn Graman**. "Another prominent factor that people face now is how busy life gets. The busyness of everyday life makes having a relationship more desirable because it's nice to have your playmate around, which allows for spontaneous playtime time, rather than having to plan and meet for dates. The use of the Internet will increase. With everyone living such busy lives and with relationships at work being awkward and sometimes dangerous, Internet meeting offers a great alternative." — Graman, a psychotherapist and author specializing in helping women with their relationships, is co-founder of Life Works, Inc. (www.lifeworksgroup.com), a counseling center based in New York. **"With respect to marriages in 2005, many people are assessing how much the world has changed since 9/11 and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq," says Stacy D. Phillips. "Those assessments will cause many to continue what we have seen during the past two years, that is to leave unhappy or marginal marriages. More than ever it seems people are deciding that time is just too precious, and why waste it hoping a marriage will get better. If there are problems, the marriage typically gets worse. I expect the numbers (when it comes to divorce), will go up, not down in 2005."** — Phillips, a Los Angeles family law attorney (www.PLLaw.com), has been named one of the Top 50 Female Litigators in California by the Los Angeles Daily Journal. **Aquarius (Jan. 20 - Feb. 18)** — Rebellious, independent and idealistic, you're quite a catch for anyone lucky enough to grab you. But keeping you is anything but easy — only a few special people are up to task. In 2005, you'll only partner up if someone especially extraordinary comes along — just how you like it. (www.Astrology.com) "Sitting home alone...a virtual impossibility" — "Online dating will make sitting home alone on Saturday night a virtual impossibility — or a literal virtual possibility — whether you're chatting up a stranger on an online dating site or going out to dinner with someone you just met online, there are now infinite possibilities for love," says **April Masini**. The old advice on places to meet single men and women are now exponential thanks to the Internet. Moreover, now that there are so many dating venues, any dating problems sit squarely with the individual. Do you know what you want? Are you expressing it? How's your interpersonal communication? Everyone sees therapist as often and as regularly as they buy a quart of milk — and look where that's gotten us! A divorce rate that's sky high. Therapists will become the future lawyers — necessary, expensive and the butt of jokes. The new place to seek guidance will be religion. And guidance will include all matters of the heart and family." — Masini, an Internet dating and relationship expert, pens the "Ask April" advice column at www.AskApril.com. **Pisces (Feb. 19 - March 20)** — Your head may normally float in the clouds, but this year, if you stand firmly on the ground, you'll get all the romance you desire, and then some. Selfless and idealistic, you're naturally alluring, but in 2005, something will click and suitors will flock from everywhere to catch your eye. (www.Astrology.com) "In 2005 people will take a more active role in their love relationships, ending unfulfilling relationships more quickly and cleanly, and setting the stage for better romantic decision-making," says **Sean K. Murphy**. "Look for relationship housecleaning in 2005 as more people toss aside their regrets over choosing and sticking with the wrong person and apply the lessons of their past to more connective future romantic relationships." Murphy, whose predictions are based on a national survey of 1,000 adult Americans, is author of the book, "The Spirit Man" (Xlibris Corp.). — Compiled by Rad Dewey, Yahoo! Personals