Late parenthood does have some perks

When is the right time to have a child and will having one make you happy, especially if you already have older children? It might depend on how you define happiness and how you create meaning in your life.

I know I haven’t quite answered my own dilemma – why have a baby knowing it won’t make you happy? Well, it depends on what we mean by happiness. True, the hedonic enjoyment of life goes down substantially and doesn’t recover until children leave home (and my husband will be in his seventies then). Long live the British common-sense wisdom insisting children must fly the nest during university years! However, research talks of two types of happiness – hedonic, which is concerned with homeostasis and pleasure, and eudaimonic, which is concerned with meaning and fulfillment. So, while the pleasure plummets in the permanent run for the satisfaction of everybody else’s needs rather than your own, the happiness-as-meaning factor does actually improve after having children.

I find almost every moment with my baby Theodore meaningful – helping him to put three words together into a sentence, ignoring a temper tantrum, knowing that contrary to appearance it would undoubtedly benefit his own wellbeing; or happily exclaiming ‘cow!’ for the 3,021st time, confirming again and again that it actually does give milk.

The decision to have children – be it the first or the fifth – is certainly not an easy one. Do you listen to your heart, or your friends, or pore over the scientific research statistics? Perhaps the best decision at all is to use all of your life experience to help you evaluate what decision is the right one for you as a family.

GOT A QUESTION FOR ILONA? Email ilona@psychologies.co.uk, with ‘ILONA’ in the subject line.

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