

BABY DEBATE



Everything you need to consider
BEFORE
becoming a parent

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BEFORE
becoming a parent

Diane Polnow



PRODUCTIONS

Baby Debate™

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Baby Debate™

I dedicate this book to all the children in this world:

May you feel loved and wanted.

I also dedicate this book to all the parents in the world:

*May you tell and show your children
that they are loved and wanted.*

Let them know they matter.

With love,

Diane

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



I would first like to acknowledge my birthmother and birthfather. Wherever you are, whoever you are, thank you for creating me. Even though you weren't ready to have me, you gave me a blessing so I can help others be more prepared, more educated, and better equipped to have children if they so desire.

I've had a blessed life and someday, maybe someday, I'll have the honor of meeting and knowing you.

I'll never let go of my dream of meeting and knowing you.

I'd also like to acknowledge my adoptive parents. You were both in this world for too short of a time. Thank you for

providing me with a blessed life and for teaching me morals, values, integrity, and work ethic.

To all my friends:

You've touched my life in more ways than you know. I learned I can create my own family. I chose you to be my family and I thank you for filling a big void in my life. You've shown me the unconditional love that I didn't get from my family. You've touched my heart more than you know.

I love you dearly.

I thank anyone who may have said my book was anti-children. If you knew me, you'd know that I've loved children my entire life and always will. That's one driving force for why I wrote this book—*for children*. From you, I've learned and grown.

I would like to also thank the amazing editorial team who helped shape and mold this book—the team at Write to Sell Your Book: Diane O'Connell, my editor, who helped guide me every step of the way from my beginning idea to a completed book; Cristina Schreil, whose deft reporting, researching and writing skills helped bring the parents' and experts' stories to life; and Linda H. Dolan, whose comprehensive copyediting skills helped ensure the quality of this book. As a first time author, the talent, support and work you have all provided was invaluable. Many thanks go to the experts who provided meaningful and important information for this book and to everyone who provided beneficial and relevant anecdotes. I truly appreciate and am grateful for your contribution.

I put my message out to the world with the intention of helping make the world a better place and helping people be more mindful and conscious of their decisions to become parents and raise children who are loved and wanted.

And you can too ...

With love,

Diane

CONTENTS



INTRODUCTION

page 1

CHAPTER 1

TAKING A LIFETIME TRIP TO THE UNKNOWN Exploring the Journey of Parenthood

page 7

CHAPTER 2

WHY DO YOU WANT TO TAKE THIS TRIP? The Search for What's Driving Your Decision

page 18

CHAPTER 3

TOP MYTHS — PREPARING FOR A SMOOTH FLIGHT Tips from Other Travelers

page 47

CHAPTER 4

YOUR MONEY How Much Does this Trip Cost?

page 69

CHAPTER 5
YOUR RELATIONSHIP
Are You Both on the Same Flight?
page 89

CHAPTER 6
YOUR MIND & YOUR BODY
Preparing for a Bumpy Ride
page 114

CHAPTER 7
AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL
Choosing the Best Route for You
page 146

CHAPTER 8
A VIEW FROM HIS SEAT
The Man's Perspective
page 163

CHAPTER 9
A VIEW FROM THE CHILD'S SEAT
The Child's Perspective
page 195

CHAPTER 10
ARE YOU READY TO BOARD?
Is Parenthood for You?
page 227

ENDNOTES
page 251

INTRODUCTION



The decision to have a baby and become a parent is *the* biggest decision you'll ever make. It's bigger than getting married. There are hundreds of books on the market and a plethora of information on the Internet that help once you're already pregnant, but no one is teaching you what you need to know *before* you even think about becoming a parent. I'm here to help, and that's why *Baby Debate* is so unique and so important.

My intention in writing this book is to open up a whole new level of consciousness about parenting and having kids. It's neither for nor against having kids; it's simply designed to give you the valuable information you need to help you make the best decision for you. It's my opinion that too many people want to be parents but have no idea

what they're getting into before they do it. I also believe that people forget about putting the best interest of the child first.

This book is designed to dispel the fantasy and deliver the reality of what to think about *before* becoming a parent. It will give you information that you may have never heard or thought about. It will unveil aspects that perhaps no one has ever told you, but that you absolutely need to know.

My Story

I have an intense passion for children, for the subject of parenting, and for the multitude of decisions that go into whether or not to become a parent. Why? Because I was adopted. My parents adopted my brother two years before they adopted me.

I was adopted at birth through Catholic Social Services and grew up in a conservative, middle income family in Woodstock, Illinois, a small town in the suburbs of Chicago. My adoptive father was the ultimate example of a good-hearted man with Midwestern values. The greatest gift he gave me was raising me with morals, values, ethics and humility. We could sit in a room and never say a word to each other, yet I'd feel his love. My mother was a working mother. She taught me what a positive experience it is for a woman to work, to earn her own money, and to feel a sense of self-esteem and self-accomplishment from her work. I watched her develop friendships with other women she worked with and watched how she formed a small social group with them. We had a good relationship until I got into my teenage years. That's when things started to change. She began to verbally criticize me, cut me down, and make me feel I wasn't good enough. She said I was fat.

She didn't like my hair, makeup, clothes, or my boyfriend, and taught me to be embarrassed about my maturing body. When she felt badly for yelling at me, she would try to compensate for her behavior by taking me shopping. She said one thing to me I'll never forget. She said, "Don't you ever try to find your birthmother for as long as I'm alive." That hurt deeply and carved a serious wound inside me. I honored her request.

I distinctly remember the day my father told my brother and me that we were adopted. I can't remember exactly how old I was, but I think I was about 7 years old. The subject came up because I came home from school and had to complete a family tree, so I asked a lot of questions about my family history. My parents must have felt it was time to break the news.

My dad sat my brother and me down at the same time to tell us. It had an enormous impact on my brother. I remember him saying, "You didn't pick me. I was just the next kid on the list." Because I heard my older brother say this, I thought that was how I was supposed to feel too. I didn't feel special. In fact, I actually felt betrayed. How could the people I'd grown up with and trusted drop something of this magnitude on me? I felt they had been lying to me the whole time. I was confused, hurt, and didn't know what to think. I was too young to process it.

My adoptive father passed away when I was 17 yrs old. He got up one day, went to work, and never came home. He died of a massive heart attack on-the-job just one month after his 50th birthday. Six years later my adoptive mother died of cancer. By my young 20's, I was on my own—mentally, emotionally, physically, financially, relationally and spiritually.

Throughout the years, I made attempts to find and meet my birthmother. I longed to find her. Did I look like her? My ultimate wish was to just see what she looked like, to have her hold me and tell me how much she loved me. I contacted the organization I was adopted through, Catholic Social Services, to begin my search. They made phone calls to her but once they asked her to confirm her name and whether my birth date sounded familiar to her she would hang up. Since Catholic Social Services was not legally able to disclose any identifying information, I decided to hire a private investigator to find my original birth records and any other information about my birthmother. Once I got this information, I made several attempts to connect with her through phone calls, cards and letters. Unfortunately, my birthmother, for whatever reason, wasn't open to connecting. She hung up on me too.

Because of my search to find my birthmother, I found out I have a half sister. I was told my birthmother got pregnant by another man one year later and also gave up my half sister for adoption. Supposedly, she's now married to another man and has two children with him. I always wonder if she's ever told him about her other two daughters. I can only imagine the hurt and pain she's experienced by giving up not only one, but two children.

I was also given little non-identifying information about my birthfather—things such as height, hair and eye color, and religious background. He supposedly signed papers to relinquish himself once my birthmother signed papers to give me up for adoption. I never had as strong of a desire to continue my search for him as I did my mother, but I've always longed to know him as well.

My birthmother's decision to give me up for adoption has impacted my life in many ways. Some are good; some are not. And your decision to have a child will affect your child's life—perhaps in a good way, and perhaps not.

Because of this, I think it's been difficult for me to see women become so obsessed with having babies. In my research, studies and life experiences, I found that most women have no idea what they're getting into, and know very little information about parenthood. This is one reason I've always had a soft spot in my heart for children. I know the hurt and pain I experienced as a child, and I don't want other kids to experience hurt and pain because of their parents decisions.

My hope is that this book will inspire you to think and feel way beyond the baby stage. I hope you will learn as much as you can before you even think about getting pregnant and becoming a parent. Remember, it only takes that **one** time to change your life forever.

Are you ready to embark on this journey? I truly hope my book will help you and I'm honored to be your guide. Now it's time for you to have your own baby debate. Let me know what you decide.

With love,

Diane

1
TAKING A LIFETIME TRIP
TO THE UNKNOWN



Exploring the Journey of Parenthood

In spite of the six thousand manuals on child raising in the bookstores, child raising is still a dark continent and no one really knows anything. You just need a lot of love and luck — and, of course, courage.

— **BILL COSBY**, *Fatherhood*

THE ONE-WAY, NON-STOP TICKET TO AN
UNPREDICTABLE JOURNEY OF A LIFETIME



It was long before reading headlines about what stroller brands the latest A-List movie stars push and seeing a gallery on “Celebrity Moms Breastfeeding in Public” when I knew there was a problem. It wasn’t just that I saw that our society has a clear infatuation with babies. The problem I saw ran even deeper. The growing hype over the flashy side of parenting—like selecting nursery wallpaper, choosing a trendy name, and buying the latest greatest stroller—made me wonder if prospective parents were thinking about the big picture. It seems that couples

spend more time planning their dream wedding than they do deciding if they should bring another human being into this world. When it comes to truly weighing all the life-changing ramifications of raising a child—a decision that will last their entire lifetime—couples aren't planning enough at all.

Being a parent is a lifetime job. It's more than having a cute baby to snuggle, it's a commitment that alters your life *forever*. You can't quit, resign or get another job. You will keep this job for the rest of your life, and for the rest of your child's life. Many responsible parents know that parenthood is a lifetime commitment. After all, there *are* fantastic parents out there who are very aware of the commitment it takes to raise a child. But there are also parents who aren't aware of the commitment that is required. Many don't plan or prepare in advance.

In fact, here's the reality of what is happening because people don't plan or prepare. These troubling statistics show that many children are born into unhappy circumstances. Today 24 million kids are growing up without a parent. More than 107,000 children are waiting to be adopted. Of all children born to married parents this year, there's a 50 percent chance that their parents will divorce before their 18th birthday. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there were over 434,000 live births by teens aged 15 to 18 in 2009 alone. On top of this, with a growing world population of over 7 billion, there are more people on the planet than ever before.

Parenting is and always has been a wild, crazy, unknown experience. So many mistakes, setbacks and meltdowns can happen. If raising a child is touted as "one of the biggest

jobs you'll ever have," then why are there no qualifications, pre-requisites, pre-tests or mandatory courses to take or pass? Not only is parenting a job, it's a *lifelong* job. As some of the wiser parents out there can attest, it's more than just delivering a baby. Parenting is about nurturing that baby so it becomes a happy and healthy member of society.

Let's admit it, it's easy for anyone (even me) to get caught up in the blissful dream of having children. Through this book, I want to reveal the *real* consequences of having children. Getting caught up in the dream is easy. Can you get just as excited about the not-so-glamorous parts of parenting?

This book isn't for or against having kids—and make no mistake, I'm not anti-children. I love children and always have. They're the reason I wrote this book. I've simply designed this book to give you information to equip you to make the best decision for you, and to consider things you may never have thought about. I deliver eye-opening realities of parenthood to help you identify whether you're being realistic about what it *really* takes. I talk less about strollers and maternity wear and more about the mental, emotional, financial, physical, relational and spiritual realities of this commitment. It's time to *get real* and tell it like it is.

I'm passionate about ensuring that the children who do come into this world are completely happy, healthy, loved and wanted. That goal starts with *you*—the prospective parent. This book will openly discuss the pros and cons of the controversial and ever-changing topic of parenting, because when it comes to birthing and rearing a child, there are no do-overs. This book will act as your guided course and checklist to equip you *before* you become a parent. It's meant to inspire you to think about things you've never

even considered. With help from statistics, studies, experts and peers, I cover mental, emotional, financial, physical, relational and spiritual aspects of parenting, from cradle to college and beyond. Hopefully, by the last page, you'll have the knowledge to make a conscious choice about whether parenting is right for you.

Ultimately, it will be the *child's* perspective—not your own—that should drive your decision-making. It's time to embrace a new way of deciding whether parenthood is right for you.



It's time to give birth to a new way of thinking.

PARENTING FLIGHT #101



Bringing another person into this world is like purchasing a one-way, non-stop ticket for the longest, most unpredictable and important flight of your lifetime. In a split second, you're left learning how to pilot your own plane without a manual. You realize that each dip and turn the plane makes affects your precious cargo. The big blue skies of parenthood can feel intimidating and stepping into the cockpit for the first time can be an overwhelming experience. There will be times when you experience immense turbulence and at other times you may need to be rerouted. As a new parent, you may feel like you want to cancel the flight completely. And ... beware as you board this flight ...

**There are no refunds, no cancellations, no do-overs,
and there is no turning back once you've departed.**

You're probably wondering, "Isn't there *something* pleasant about this flight?"

Many people who pilot Parenting Flight #101 have no experience, no pre-training, and no idea of what to expect. Yet, we all know how easy it is to accidentally hop on board. Some flyers have never even spent time any time with kids. But some are eager to board because:

- They feel they should
- Family pressures
- Societal pressures
- Pressures from a partner
- It sounds fun
- They're bored with their life
- They think by getting pregnant, they'll get their partner to commit
- They think having a child will remedy a shaky marriage
- They want monetary gains
- Their friends have kids
- They have out-of-control passion

If you want your child to feel loved and wanted, you need more positive, conscious and responsible reasons than those listed above. This means knowing what you're getting

into *before* you get into it. I urge you to consider all of the risks of your unpredictable future *before* you depart.

I learned a few years back that just because I love someone, it doesn't mean I should marry him. The same mindset applies to parenting.



**Just because you want to be a parent,
doesn't necessarily mean you should have a baby.**

I hope to help you learn how much your ticket will cost, what you can expect on this trip, what to pack, what baggage you can leave behind, and how to approach your adventure with the right mindset. Your child deserves to have a safe plane and needs you to be an educated, committed pilot.

Please don't be a parent who treats child-rearing as trial and error and try to just wing it. My pilot did not necessarily have all of her information, and she drastically had to reroute. Take your own safety precautions, study your map, plan your route, and prepare yourself to have the smoothest flight possible. Do this *before* you take off.

Are you ready to embark on one of the wildest, most unpredictable, uncharted journeys of your life? I will be checking in as we review this pre-flight checklist to see how tightly your seat belt is fastened, or if you need an oxygen mask—or a cocktail.

Thankfully, the skies are currently clear. Please ensure that your seatbacks and tray tables are up and secured for takeoff. Buckle up. Here we go.

PARENTING — WHAT IS IT ANYWAY?



What better way to orient yourself to your journey than to start at the foundation? Let's turn to the definition of parenting. Interestingly enough, while parents are literally all around us, I've found it's hard for people to get to the crux of what this experience really is.

One man raised by a single mother told me, "It's making your dreams and responsibilities solely centered on your child. Every decision you make is about them."

A teenage boy said it's "taking care of someone, who is typically a child, over a long period of time until they are able to support themselves."

A 54-year-old dad defined it as "the chance to teach, love, nurture and wonder at your children."

To get a clearer understanding, I researched the word "parent" in three different dictionaries. "Parent" is so undefined that the world's most popular dictionaries, *Merriam Webster*, *Oxford English Dictionary*, and *American Heritage* can't even provide an "understandable" definition. Shouldn't it be a red flag that even the fathers of the English language can't seem to define what parenting is?

Have a look for yourself at these dictionary definitions:

Parent:

- Merriam Webster: "one who begets or brings forth offspring."
- American Heritage: "an organism that produces or generates offspring."
- Oxford: "a person's father or mother."

Parenting:

- Merriam Webster: “the taking care of someone in the manner of a parent.”
- American Heritage: “the rearing of a child or children, especially the care, love, and guidance given by a parent.”
- Oxford: “be or act as a mother or father to someone.”

To me, none of these three dictionaries gave a satisfactory definition. I still itched to know what exactly happens that transforms someone from a person to a *parent*?

Since the English language left me hanging, I tried to form my own definitions. These are definitions I developed and propose. You can develop your own as well.

Parent:

- one who is 100 percent responsible for the care, love, well-being, nurturing and upbringing of another human being whether they’ve actually birthed the child or not
- one who consciously and responsibly raises another human being to feel loved and wanted

Parenting:

- one of the biggest commitments you will ever make in your life
- a process you must seriously analyze prior to accepting the position
- the act of consciously and responsibly raising another human being to feel loved and wanted
- something you will do for your lifetime or for the lifetime of the child

RAISING CONSCIOUSNESS AROUND PARENTING



My intention is that you learn about child-rearing *before* you even *think* about becoming a parent. The time to know what you're getting into isn't *after* you find out you are pregnant. It's *before*. If every parent planned properly, became educated, and had reasonable expectations about his or her future life, we could ensure that the life of the amazing human being he or she brings into this world would be in healthy hands.

We each have a list of things that happened to us throughout our childhood. Those who choose to parent will inevitably risk all of this baggage resurfacing when they parent. At the moment, the only training we have is our own upbringing. Some unconsciously repeat unhealthy patterns while others choose to break the patterns and create new, healthier ones. Again, when the prospect of filling your home with a beautiful baby room and the warm coos of a cuddly newborn is on your mind, it can be difficult to reexamine your baggage with a clear head.

It's time that we as a collective group help raise the level of consciousness around what it *really* takes to be a parent. Being conscious takes more than thinking about parenting. It involves pinpointing exactly how you can harness what you have to be a *great parent*. As you'll discover through the many interviews and anecdotes in this book, reaching out to your community is a huge way to arm yourself with information, knowledge, skills and training to help decide if the world of parenting is right for you. And remember, it doesn't always have to be. While this book may educate and challenge you, it's not designed to scare you or discourage you. It's designed to help you make the best decision for your future child, for you and for your relationship.

WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT



Just look at recent U.S. statistics and you'll see why there's a real need for this book:

- Fifty percent of pregnancies in America are unplanned. Among teens, 80 percent are unplanned.¹
- For young parents aged 24 to 28, there is at least a 15 percent chance among both sexes that they will be clinically depressed.²
- Sixty-five percent of parents who had a child while cohabiting will break up by the time their child is 12, compared to just 24 percent of parents who had a child while married.³
- According to a June 2011 report, there were approximately 408,400 children in foster care in the United States.
- The average child in foster care goes through three different placements and stays in the system for nearly 37 continuous months.⁴
- Over 107,000 children are waiting to be adopted.⁵
- Of all children born to married parents this year, 50 percent will experience the divorce of their parents before they reach their 18th birthday.⁶
- Around 64,000 kids have biological parents whose parental rights were taken away from them.⁷
- According to a 2010 study by the U.S. Census Bureau, 9.9 million mothers were either separated, widowed, divorced or never married.⁸

IT'S YOUR TURN



As the pilot of your life, it's important that you're able to define what parenting means to *you*. Go ahead ... take the time now. Grab a piece of paper and create your own personal definitions. Don't think about it too much. Just write down whatever comes to you.

Baby

Parent

Child

Mother

Teenager

Father

Now try to isolate what is truly important to you. Write what you want in life, what kind of life you want to have with your partner, what kind of family you want, and what you'll need to work on or do to make it happen. Later we'll tackle all aspects of these goals.

As a potential parent, you must be aware of not only what the flight is, but also, more importantly, of what you want from it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Diane was born in Chicago, Illinois, and was adopted at birth. Her adoptive parents passed away at a young age so she began raising herself in her early 20's. Today, she's a successful businesswoman who has experience working in management for Fortune 500 companies such as Sprint and American Express. And she has an inspiring story to share.

Diane has a Masters Degree in Psychology and has done extensive research into the costs, benefits and drawbacks of child rearing. She helps people decide if they're ready to be parents. She has watched parent/child relationships her entire life and can offer an invaluable and unique vantage point.

Diane has traveled to over 11 European countries. In addition to traveling, she enjoys volunteering, listening to

music and going to concerts, cooking, playing golf, and advocating for children. For more information, visit www.babydebate.com.

Millions of people want kids but have no idea what they're really getting into. Diane's goal is to change this. It's her passion and mission to help parents realize what they're getting into before they get into it, so the world will have more children who are loved and wanted.