



I WANT CHILDREN BUT MY BOYFRIEND DOESN'T

► DEAR JOE

My boyfriend and I have been together for six years and have discussed marriage, but recently we've disagreed over the prospect of raising children. I don't know what this means for us in the long-term. We're both in our 30s, and I'd pop the question tomorrow if it wasn't for the fact he's said he doesn't ever want children. He's great with kids, but he doesn't want

the financial and physical strain that comes with them. I've always wanted a family, and the thought of possibly not having one was one of the hardest things for me to accept as a young gay guy growing up. Is this irreconcilable? I love him so much but it feels like if we stay together one of us is going to end up unhappy.

PAUL, LONDON

→ **HI PAUL,**

I think it is great that you have started talking with your boyfriend about having children. This is an important decision that can make or break a relationship. I always counsel couples in serious relationships to talk about it as soon as possible. I wonder why you didn't raise it earlier with him? Or did he have a different opinion before? You say that your boyfriend tells you that "he doesn't ever want children." This is nothing to take lightly. If he is really this clear on the issue, then he's going to have to change his mind completely for the two of you to become successful parents. It is a decision that will affect the rest of your lives, as well as the life of your child.

We have decades of scientific research now to show that gay parents are just as effective at raising children as heterosexual couples. Though there are differences in the children's psychological adjustment, studies have found no difference in life outcomes for the children. Reports that there are problems in same-sex parent households have been consistently refuted. Science supports same-sex parenting.

In fact, because gay people must choose to be parents, they tend to have more intentionality in that choice. In other words, they have put more thought into it. This is especially important in your situation, given that your boyfriend has expressed strong concerns even to the point of disinterest.

Even as I write this response to you, a landmark case in Michigan in the USA is bringing the issue of same-sex parenting into the legal system for the first time. The scientific studies I referred to are undergoing close legal scrutiny. A lesbian couple with children is using the state to be granted legal marriage for protection of their children, so that both parents will be their legal kin. A judge will decide the credibility of the evidence in these studies and the opinions of experts as he considers whether or not Michigan's ban on same-sex marriage is unconstitutional. I believe those who support blocking same-sex parenting will be thrown out of court, because the 'studies' they cite are flawed and prejudiced.

The good news is that these days same-sex parenting is an option! I am from a generation where this was never even considered. In my youth

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a gay man understood that being gay meant being childless. This is not true any longer. I work with gay teens whose parents' first reaction to their coming out is to grieve the loss of grandchildren. These gay teenagers look at their parents confused and angry and respond, "Of course I am going to have children, what makes you think otherwise?" How times have changed!

The bad news is that this new freedom brings new challenges, and you are facing one of them. Here are some things I think you and your boyfriend should consider:

THINK ABOUT THE CHILD FIRST

My first concern is for the children. They don't get to choose their parents, and they deserve to enter a family where both parents want them. The parents don't have to want a child "equally," but they both need to be certain that having a child is a welcome and intentional, joint decision.

PROTECT YOUR RELATIONSHIP FROM RESENTMENT

No one should be forced into anything. You should never try to coerce your partner to change his mind if it is already made up. You either have to accept not having a child or find a new partner. I know this will be hard – it sounds like you love your boyfriend. However, you may have to decide what you want more. If you choose your partner and you remain childless, you will have to keep him safe from any potential resentment.

MAKE SURE THAT IF YOUR BOYFRIEND DECIDES TO HAVE THE CHILD HE DOESN'T CARRY RESENTMENT TOWARDS THE CHILD

You will have to talk together enough to work through all the ramifications of whatever you both need, to decide for yourselves, your relationship, and most importantly, the child. The child's needs come first. It's an enormous commitment.

IT TAKES TWO YESES BUT ONLY ONE NO

Don't ever try to drag a partner into parenting (or any other life-long commitment for that matter). If you yourself really want kids and your boyfriend really doesn't, move on to someone else who does. Don't let your partner rob you of the opportunity to have what you have been dreaming of all your life.

MANY COUPLES USE FAMILY OR NANNIES TO HELP RAISE CHILDREN

Is there an option to get help from others to reduce the work and stress of taking care of a child? If you can get help, it might make a difference in your partner's thinking.

TRY FOSTERING A CHILD

If your boyfriend comes around to wanting a child but fears the uncertainty, you could consider giving a temporary home to a foster child. Fostering is time-limited and would give you both a chance to see how you do as parents.

My bottom line for you: Either decide together to co-parent with both of you committed 100 percent or break off your relationship and have children on your own or with a new partner. If you know in your heart you must have kids and at the end of your life you would regret not having them, then this second choice is the right choice for you. Children deserve parents who are committed and invested in them.



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