



by Karen Stephens

Parenting Offers Daily Surprises — Spread the Word!

If you have a child, it's no news that parenting requires a lot of patience and sacrifice. Life after baby bears little resemblance to life before baby. Why weren't we better prepared for the reality of it? Why are so many new parents surprised by the rigors of childrearing?

The everyday, nitty-gritty parenting challenges aren't covered in your typical "how-to-raise-your-ever-lovin'-baby" books. And I have a sneaking suspicion they aren't a hot topic for young couples during courtship, either.

Of course, there are many rewards when raising children. But it doesn't hurt to remind ourselves of the real world of bringing up baby. With that in mind, following are some childrearing "surprises" that most parents face at one time or another. Any sound familiar?

Things Every Parent-To-Be Should Know

- It's really hard not to feel like a lowlife traitor when your baby is laid out on the doctor's table, reaching up to you hoping you'll use your God-like parent power to save her from being stabbed with that long, shiny needle . . . filled with life-saving vaccine. Who knew doing right by your child could feel so terrible?
- In terms of life's little luxuries, the bath water gets thrown out with the baby. Never again will you relax for hours in a bubble-bath reading a best-selling paperback; you'll be interrupted by the kids every two minutes in desperate need of your immediate attention.
- You'll fall hopelessly, head-over-heels in love with your newborn. But someday you'll also be incredulous, baffled, and downright mortified when that same child comes home with a pierced body part you'd never dream of messing with!
- With baby, you won't have a hot meal for at least 3 years (if then). You'll be trying to get a hot meal into your child's mouth rather than on the floor, table, chairs, ceiling, etc.
- Someday, you'll turn into a clone of your parents by saying: "How many times have I told you that chewing with your mouth open is not funny?"
- Someday, you'll be so angry with your child that you'll shout "Will you paaahleeezzzee act your age!" Your indignant child will reply: "But I'm only fouah!" (That's four to you and me.)
- After a hard day at work, your kids will likely to be on their worst behavior, too.
- Whenever you hear an ambulance siren, your breath will catch — until you remember your kids are safe and sound sitting right next you.
- You'll never know the true torture of a sleepless night until your just-turned-16-driver is two hours late for curfew.
- Someday you'll lament sending *your baby* to school with all those "other"-children and their bad habits. After all, your lil' darling has none.

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- Someday, when you're thinking the above thought, other parents in the neighborhood will be wondering — out loud and to each other — “Can't they control their own child? How can they let him get away with that?”
- Parenting a preschooler means forgetting what an uninterrupted telephone conversation is like.
- Parenting teenagers means you'll never have a chance at the phone to even start a conversation.

Why are so many new parents surprised by the rigors of childrearing?

- Between the ages of 25 and 35 a child-free person ages 10 years. Between the ages of 25 and 35 a person with children ages 20. (Go figure!)
- Before children, good wine and cheese are on hand for company. After children, the best you'll have to offer is a kiddy cuisine favorite á la Spaghetti-o's™!
- Your loving, cozy home can, at the drop of a hat, turn into something akin to a torture chamber. Temper tantrums have a way of being very dramatic.
- When parenting a teen-ager, you'll be required to become a skilled debater. Be prepared for very loooong rounds.
- One day, you'll have to admit your parents were a lot smarter (and more patient) than you ever imagined. It's no fun eating crow, is it?

About the Author — Karen Stephens is director of Illinois State University Child Care Center and instructor in child development for the ISU Family and Consumer Sciences Department. For nine years she wrote a weekly parenting column in her local newspaper. Karen has authored early care and education books and is a frequent contributor to *Exchange*.