

# Advice from the Trenches: Is He Right for Me?



Dear C;

I've always wanted children. I've gone out with a number of guys and had one serious relationship, but in the end, what decided it for me was the kids factor. Most guys in their 20s actually seem afraid of children. Then I met Danny. He's fun to be with, the attraction is there, he's got a good job and he likes kids! We got engaged last month. I should be thrilled. But honestly, now I'm wondering if he'd be a good father.

Danny is great at playing with children. He has a riot with my kid brother. But his own father was a real asshole; he left Mom on her own to deal with the kids, and if there were any fights, he'd walk out and stay at his office until his wife called and begged him to come home. He resented it if anything interfered with his plans and he made sure everyone knew it.

I can see signs of this in Danny. Things are great as long as life goes as planned, but if a wrench gets thrown in the works and something unexpected happens, his first reaction is to get pissed off. If I call him on it, he will tone it down and apologize, but the next time he's surprised, he just gets pissed off all over again.

Except for this little nagging doubt, I feel solid about us. I know that everyone feels scared at the thought of commitment. I also know no one is perfect, and there will be problems to work out with even the ideal partner. Should I just go ahead with it and hope for the best?

Hopeful Hannah

Dear Hannah,

This would be an easy call if humans were predictable. Any therapist will tell you that, unless they have received considerable reprogramming, people generally learn all of their parenting skills from their own parents. If Danny's dad was an asshole, that could very well be Danny's default setting, too. But the prospect of children has been known to change both men and women when nothing else could.

My first husband was a bad boy who held the high school record for days absent and dropped out without graduating. We were only 19 when we ran off to Canada and got married. The relationship didn't work out, probably because we were so young, but fatherhood changed him completely. He held down a steady job, became a Little League coach, the whole bit. Our marriage ended, but his commitment to our son continued through life.

A friend of mine, who is a doctor, says that in his practice, he sees this a lot. When they find out they're going to become fathers, young men who never bothered to see a doctor before will come in and want to make sure everything is okay. They suddenly realize they have responsibilities and want to make sure they're fit to handle them.

On the other hand, there are also guys out there for whom fatherhood just makes everything worse. As long as the honeymoon continues and they get all the attention, they're fine. But when kids enter the picture, they just can't keep it up. They stay away more, lose their temper faster, resent it all quicker ... and there you are, caught in a dysfunctional marriage of your own.

You need to talk all this out before you get married, not after. I would suggest bringing a third-party counselor into the equation. If you just haul out your own fears and try to corner Danny into being accountable, that leaves you wagging your finger and him feeling like he's getting a lecture from his teacher. Consider that you might have issues of your own to work on. Is it the marriage you want or the child? Too many women get married because their biological clocks are ticking and they see enough raw material in a man that they believe they can "work on him." Bad idea. A man isn't some dog you are training. He is a human being who is what he is. Don't try to turn Danny into a father just because you want children and you are afraid it will never happen. That's why the third-party is important: perspective and equality.

The truth is, you can never really be sure about anything until it happens. Life is often a bit like a jumping off a cliff without knowing what's at the bottom. But some people just throw themselves over the edge without looking, and some people bring a parachute, sturdy shoes and a good flashlight. Who would you rather be?