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**Dr. Jenn**

Dr. Jenn Berman

## Joyless Parent? Don't Be!

Kate had been married for five years when she became pregnant. Her husband was ecstatic when he found out the news but Kate was terrified. I still remember the look of fear on her face when she told me over lunch. Her eyes seemed to say "Is there any way we can keep this baby in my uterus forever?" Seeing her approach the due date was like watching a condemned prisoner inch closer to an execution date. Kate, who had survived a terrible childhood herself, seemed to dread the delivery day. So it is understandable that everyone was shocked when only hours after holding her baby girl she exclaimed, "I'm ready for three more!"

What many people don't realize is that when a baby is born a parent is created as well. That evolution is one of the most life-changing events a human being can experience. For some people, parenthood is an easy transition which they embrace naturally. For others it is like falling off a cliff, evoking feelings of terror and an extreme loss of control.

The way we look at parenthood comes from a combination of factors, some inborn and some learned. We unconsciously absorb the subtle messages we get from our own parents' perception of parenthood. Women who have a positive identification with their mothers look forward to becoming mothers themselves. Many people grow up with an instinctual, almost primal, urge to become a parent while for others it represents nothing more than a loss of youth.

This column is for those who struggle to embrace parenthood as well as those who have already figured out how to do it with ease - but still second-guess themselves when things get tough. For all of you I share "10 Great Reasons to Embrace Parenthood:"  
**The chance to be less narcissistic and self-focused.** Most people grow up with a healthy self-focus. We worry about the size of our thighs or gut or what we should wear to a party or what our friends really think of us. There is something about having a child that yanks us out of that type of thinking. Many parents find this to be a refreshing break.  
**The chance to be a kid again.** Let's face it, if you brought Legos to the next dinner party you went to, your friends would think

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you were a little strange. Having a child gives you permission to crawl on the floor, build a clubhouse and play Barbies. Parenthood enables you to be in touch with your own "inner child."

**The chance to have the parent-child relationship you always dreamed of, but from the other**

**side.** There is something very healing about providing your own child with the kind of parenting you never got.

**The chance to feel a type of love that is incomprehensible.** There are no words to describe the kind of love a parent feels for their child. It is primal, deep, and unconditional.

**The chance to see and appreciate your own parents in a whole new way.** Becoming a parent gives you a new awareness of all the things your parents did right that you never thought about before. This new insight often brings new parents closer to their own parents.

**The chance to make the world a better place by raising a decent human being.** The behaviorists believe that children start out as a blank slate. While that may be extreme, we do have the opportunity to teach our children values and behaviors that are meaningful to us. Ideally, your child is your greatest contribution to society.

**The chance to be a better person by being a role model.** Children watch our every move and imitate us. Our own actions become the template with which they form their own behaviors.

**The chance to be loved unconditionally.** Babies are born ready to love and attach. By feeding, changing and holding them we provide our children with care that bonds them to us for a lifetime. Even during those brutal teenage years when the bond is buried beneath contempt, it still exists.

**The chance to go shopping.** On a completely superficial level, there is nothing cuter than the stuff that is made for children. Baby clothes, hair accessories, tiny sporting goods, and small-scale bedroom furniture are adorable. Children grow so fast you get to buy them new stuff all the time!

**The chance to have fun!** Children are the funniest people in the world. With their uninhibited joy for life they have an amazing ability to make you laugh and smile.

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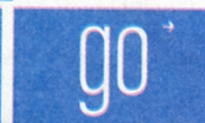
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