

What Becoming a Parent Really Does to Your Happiness

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Few choices are more important than whether to have children, and psychologists and other social scientists have worked to figure out what having kids means for happiness. Some of the most prominent scholars in the field have argued that if you want to be happy, it's best to be childless. Others have pushed back, pointing out that a lot depends on who you are and where you live. But a bigger question is also at play: What if the rewards of having children are different from, and deeper than, happiness?

The early research is decisive: Having kids is bad for quality of life. [In one study](#), the psychologist Daniel Kahneman and his colleagues asked about 900 employed women to report, at the end of each day, every one of their activities and how happy they were when they did them. They recalled being with their children as less enjoyable than many other activities, such as watching TV, shopping, or preparing food. Other studies find that when a child is born, parents experience a [decrease in happiness](#) that doesn't go away for a long time, in addition to a [drop in marital satisfaction](#) that doesn't usually recover until the children leave the house. As the Harvard professor Dan Gilbert [puts it](#), "The only symptom of empty nest syndrome is nonstop smiling."

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