

WEEK 31: ARE YOU REALLY "BEYOND BABY"?

As I was wrapping gifts this past Christmas, I got more than a little teary-eyed over the fact that both of my eldest sons were receiving shaving kits. Shaving kits!

Wasn't it just yesterday that I was wrapping wooden train pieces and pull toys to put under the tree for my two manly boys?

Clara, too, has outgrown many of the toddler/preschooler type toys I was used to buying for so many years. And my middle boys are getting harder and harder to shop for as they move out of easy LEGO sets and action figures and toward the nebulous tween years.



No doubt about it, my family has gotten big...and fast. The holidays act as a marker of just how quickly the time goes by: I can remember so clearly the gifts I wrapped each year, where we were living at the time, what the décor looked like, how the kids reacted on Christmas morning. String sixteen of those single days together, and you've outlined my experience as a mother and the entire life of my oldest child.

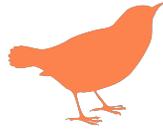
Pretty heavy stuff, huh?

Watching our children grow can be wonderful and exciting and sad and terrifying. It can also leave us feeling unmoored and unfocused, unsure about our priorities, how to spend our time, and the role we are supposed to play in their lives. It can also, understandably, leave us wondering if we're really "done."

Obviously, as a mother of five I think large families are wonderful. But while I believe there's always room in a mom's heart for one more, the same cannot always be said for a home or a budget or even a career.



While having another baby hasn't been a physical option for me since my surgery over the summer, it ceased to be an emotional option a few years ago, when I looked at the family I created, thought about the dreams and plans I have for our futures, sized up my capacity to give to them all...and then gave a wistful little sigh and officially called it quits.



Your Challenge: Explore Just How “Done” You Are

It's such an incredibly personal choice, the decision of whether or not to have more children (or even the decision whether or not you'll decide, depending on your religious views.) If you and/or your spouse are feeling uncertain about whether or not your baby-making days are behind you, this week's assignment is for you.

Get out your Beyond Baby Workbook and jot down the answers to these questions:

- When you picture yourself as a grandmother hosting a holiday gathering, how many children and grandchildren do you see at the table?
- How able were you to care for yourself – get enough sleep, keep important medical appointments, eat well, attend to your mental health – when your existing children were small? If the answer is “not well” do you have supports in place that would make it easier this time around? If not, is the tradeoff worth the addition to the family?
- What financial, lifestyle or health tradeoffs might you have to make to accommodate another baby in your life?
- What did you love about having a new baby in the house? What did you not love so much?
- What do you love about your life now? What don't you love so much?

Keep writing if you like! These are just jumping-off points to get you thinking about your life as a mom now, how it would really look if you added to your family, and whether or not that's the right choice for you and your spouse.

Of course, nobody else can tell you whether or not to have more children. But I will share three truths – some of which seem to conflict, but really don't - that I have come to realize about myself and many women I know.



First, rarely does anyone actually regret adding a child to the family, even if it means they have to go through a phase they aren't crazy about (toddlerhood, ahem) all over again. Every phase passes quickly, and you get a new human being to love for your whole life. A pretty decent tradeoff, if you ask me!

And yet often, when a woman feels a longing for another baby, she's actually feeling nostalgia for the infancy of her current child and longing for a return to the chaotic yet somehow simple days of mothering an infant. She may also be feeling fear about what lies around the corner and how she will face it when she has grown so comfortable in the role as Mama to babies and young children.

Finally, it's not always possible to just know you are "done." Yes, some women have that sense of completion, of just knowing. For the rest of us, the decision is much more ambivalent. We might decide by not-deciding, until our youngest is old enough – or we're old enough! – that having another child no longer seems like the right thing to do.

Or maybe we know that we can't give all that we want to give to another baby and our existing children while still taking reasonable care of ourselves.

But your head and heart may never come to a full agreement on your family size, and that's OK. The key is using both your head and your heart to make a decision, learning how to embrace whatever decision you make and – whether it's now or five years from now - creating the life you want to live Beyond Baby.

Challenge Checklist

- ✓ Use the prompts provided to write down your thought about being "done" having babies
- ✓ Write notes & observations in workbook