

PARENTHOOD

PRIMER

Preparation for parenthood is not just a matter of reading books and decorating the nursery. Here are 12 simple tests for expectant parents to take to prepare themselves for the real-life experience of being a mother or father.

1. Women: to prepare for maternity, put on a dressing gown and stick a beanbag chair down the front. Leave it there for 9 months. After 9 months, take out 10% of the beans. Men: to prepare for paternity, go to the local drug store, tip the contents of your wallet on the counter, and tell the pharmacist to help himself. Then go to the supermarket. Arrange to have your salary paid directly to their head office. Go home. Pick up the paper. Read it for the last time.
2. Before you finally go ahead and have children, find a couple who are already parents and berate them about their methods of discipline, lack of patience, appallingly low tolerance levels, and how they have allowed their children to run riot. Suggest ways in which they might improve their child's sleeping habits, toilet training, table manners and overall behaviour. Enjoy it-it'll be the last time in your life that you will have all the answers.
3. To discover how the nights will feel, walk around the living room from 5pm to 10pm carrying a wet bag weighing approximately 8-12 lbs. At 10pm put the bag down, set the alarm for midnight, and go to sleep. Get up at 12 and walk around the living room again, with the bag, till 1am. Put the alarm on for 3am. As you can't get back to sleep get up at 2am and make a drink. Go to bed at 2:45am. Get up again at 3am when the alarm goes off. Sing songs in the dark until 4am. Put the alarm on for 5am. Get up. Make breakfast. Keep this up for 5 years. Look cheerful.
4. Can you stand the mess children make? To find out, smear peanut butter onto the sofa and jam onto the curtains. Hide a fish stick behind the stereo and leave it there all summer. Stick your fingers in the flowerbeds then rub them on the clean walls. Cover the stains with crayons. How does that look?
5. Dressing small children is not as easy as it seems: first buy an octopus and a string bag. Attempt to put the octopus into the string bag so that none of the arms hang out. Time allowed for this: all morning.

6. Take an egg carton. Using a pair of scissors and a pot of paint turn it into an alligator. Now take a toilet tube. Using only scotch tape and a piece of foil, turn it into a Christmas candle. Last, take a milk container, a ping pong ball, and an empty package of Cocoa Pops and make an exact replica of the Eiffel Tower. Congratulations. You have just qualified for a place on the playgroup committee.
7. Forget the Miata and buy a Taurus. And don't think you can leave it out in the driveway spotless and shining. Family cars don't look like that. Buy a chocolate ice cream bar and put it in the glove compartment. Leave it there. Get a quarter. Stick it in the cassette player. Take a family-size packet of chocolate cookies. Mash them down the back seats. Run a garden rake along both sides of the car. There. Perfect.
8. Get ready to go out. Wait outside the toilet for half an hour. Go out the front door. Come in again. Go out. Come back in. Go out again. Walk down the front path. Walk back up it. Walk down it again. Walk very slowly down the road for 5 minutes. Stop to inspect minutely every cigarette butt, piece of used chewing gum, dirty tissue and dead insect along the way. Retrace your steps. Scream that you've had as much as you can stand, until the neighbors come out and stare at you. Give up and go back into the house. You are now just about ready to try taking a small child for a walk.
9. Always repeat everything you say at least five times.
10. Go to your local supermarket. Take with you the nearest thing you can find to a pre-school child—a fully grown goat is excellent. If you intend to have more than one child, take more than one goat. Buy your week's groceries without letting the goats out of your sight. Pay for everything the goats eat or destroy. Until you can easily accomplish this do not even contemplate having children.
11. Hollow out a melon. Make a small hole in the side. Suspend it from the ceiling and swing it from side to side. Now get a bowl of soggy Wheaties and attempt to spoon it into the swaying melon by pretending to be an airplane. Continue until half the Wheaties are gone. Tip the rest into your lap, making sure that a lot of it falls on the floor. You are now ready to feed a 12-month-old baby.
12. Learn the names of every character from Barney and Friends, Sesame Street and Blue's Clues. When you find yourself singing Barney's theme song, "I love you.. You love me..." at work, you finally qualify as a parent.