

## You Don't Have to Be a "Kid-Person"

When I tell my grandmother that I will live my life without biological children, she rolls her eyes and tells me that I'll change my mind once I meet "the one." Don't get me wrong – I love the presence of a cooing baby or an energetic kid– but I personally do not plan on having a child in the near or far future. Just as there are "dog people" and "cat people," I believe that there are "kid people," too – and I'm just not one of them.

Although people may dismiss my declaration as the short-sighted rebellion of an 18-year-old, my decision stems from pragmatic observations of my values and the world. I grew up believing that having children was a critical rite of passage: when my seven-year-old self saw two teenagers kissing at the mall, I created pseudonyms and whispered to my twin sister, "Michael and Elena sitting in a tree, K-I-S-S-I-N-G. First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes a baby in the baby carriage!" Here, I was chained to the societal norm that having children was a required step in life. However, when I became exposed to more ideas, ranging from feminism to environmentalism, I started questioning the expectation that I had to become a mom. At first, I thought I was an anomaly, but [fertility rates](#) in the U.S. hit an all-time low in 2018, which shows that I'm not the only young woman choosing to forgo motherhood.

Making the choice to have kids is far more complicated in the modern era than for past generations. Since [1960](#), the cost of raising a child for seventeen years has increased by 16%; today, a middle-income, married couple spends \$233,610 on one child for the same time frame. Modern-day parenting is more expensive due to [major issues](#) such as "immigration, education, housing, the labor supply, and the social safety net" and a growing expectation of what defines being "good parents." [Regardless](#) of race, gender, education, and socioeconomic status, parents have expressed wanting "the best" for their offspring. Moreover, the hyperactive hands-on crafting of organic meals and transporting children to and fro private lessons, which seem to be essential for ensuring a child's success, add large costs to everyday life. As college debt and lack of financial security loom ahead for my generation, we must be conscious that we might not be able to provide the same opportunities to our offspring that we've enjoyed.

Even if one is financially secure enough to raise a child in today's economy, the stress of parenthood takes a toll on both parents *and* children. A [study](#) found that when parents are "significantly stressed during their child's first few years of life, some of the children's genes – involved in insulin production and in brain development – were affected even years later, in adolescence." In addition to in utero stress impacting children, stress outside the womb can actually lead to anxious offspring. With all the stressors in the world today, I doubt my ability to raise an emotionally and psychologically healthy child.

Although the impact of having children on day-to-day life is concerning, my concern for the environment drives my decision to not have children. Having one fewer child will ["reduce carbon emissions for each parent by 58.6 tonnes for each year of their life,"](#)

compared to living car-free and eating a plant-based diet, which saves 2.4 tonnes and .82 tonnes per year, respectively. Furthermore, a child born today will most likely live in an environmentally compromised world of increased droughts, floods, wildfires, diseases, famine, water scarcity, and more. Other [millennials](#) join me in considering how climate change impacts their decision to have children. Of course, simply abstaining from having kids will not stop nor eliminate climate change, but going childless is one of the most environmentally friendly actions to reduce one's carbon footprint.

In the end, I encourage you to be cognizant and respectful of a childfree path. That means catching yourself before asking, *When are you having kids?* or *Who will take care of you when you're older?* to any adult (or teenager!) who chooses to be childfree. Even though I'm not a "kid person," I'll still happily accept invitations to my friends' children's birthday parties and eagerly be that fun aunt or godmother at Thanksgiving. All I ask is that you understand that parenthood should not be an obligation, but a choice.

Links about overpopulation and climate change:

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/jul/12/want-to-fight-climate-change-have-fewer-children>

<https://www.standard.co.uk/lifestyle/no-kids-better-for-the-environment-a4198451.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/05/climate/climate-change-children.html?auth=login-email&login=email>

<https://www.vox.com/2019/3/11/18256166/climate-change-having-kids>

Economics and children:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/05/upshot/americans-are-having-fewer-babies-they-told-us-why.html>

<https://www.marketwatch.com/story/one-theory-on-why-having-kids-makes-people-unhappy-2019-02-26>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/25/upshot/the-relentlessness-of-modern-parenting.html>

Parental Stress:

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/alicegwaltton/2012/07/25/how-parents-stress-can-hurt-a-child-from-the-inside-out/#723e66806b38>