

Looking ahead to when children are older, parents didn't have problems being in their fifties when their children were teenagers. Once your child is born you are there, you love them, and that's it. You sacrifice yourself; you do things you would never believe you were capable of for them regardless of your age.

## Looking Ahead



As the children get beyond the baby stage, new difficulties can appear.

"I think one problem for the older mother is that you hit your real mid-life crisis at the same time as motherhood, and this tends to intensify everything. If you are 25 when you have a baby, you can think you'll get into a career when they start school and so on; you have all your life before you. When you have your children, as I did, at 39 and 41, they start school when you're 45. What have you done with your life? Can you stand the strain of motherhood and work? Are you too old to get back into your career? In a few years you're coping with menopause, with a host of emotional reactions, and you've still got to be a mother meeting the demands of very young children."

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"Having a baby late-and an older husband-meant I had to cope with a lot of problems all at once. I had to cope with finding the right school for my 5-year-old child, toddler tantrums, go to the hospital with my husband for investigations into his heart problem, and deal with the heavy bleeding that seemed to be a precursor of menopause."

Looking ahead to when children are older, the majority of mothers did not seem to anticipate any particular problems in being in their fifties when their children were teenagers. "I think talk about the 'generation gap'



Between 2002 and 2003, birth rates for women ages 30-34 increased by 4 percent and for women 35-39 increased by 6 percent. For women 40-44, the rate rose 5 percent. In the 22 years from 1981 to 2003, that demographic group's birth rate doubled, the CDC reported

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is a lot of nonsense," says Karen, who was 39 and 41 when her two sons were born; now she is in her fifties. "When I compare myself to my son's friends' parents who are younger, I don't see any difference in the children's attitudes toward us. It's normal for all children to think their parents are old, fuddy-duddy, out of touch. They

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love to say, 'Oh Mom, surely you've heard of x or y?' In fact, I think there's less of a generation gap than there was between my parents' generation and us. There seemed to be such a gulf between our parents, who were young during the war, and us, who were young during the sixties. That's not the case now. Today's kids are just as likely to be listening to sixties music as to nineties and we share some of the same heroes. That certainly wasn't true of my parents!"

Older mothers who have teenagers and young babies in the house may find the generation gap has another angle. "My teenage son wants to play his music, have friends over and be generally noisy just when the baby's finally settled and I need peace and quiet. And then there are times when he wants help with his homework and the baby is screaming and needs attention. So it's a complex juggling act. On the other hand, Joey can be wonderfully kind and attentive to the baby and sometimes he's a great help. He'll baby-sit for a little while or make me a cup of coffee when I'm dead on my feet."

Teenagers with young half-brothers and sisters often oscillate between rapt attention and delight, and disgust and

utter boredom, depending on their mood. "I think the important thing is to divide attention fairly equally, to give the older ones their time and the young ones theirs, and not expect the whole family to revolve around the baby," says Sarah, with two teenagers from her first marriage and a toddler and baby from her second.

### The Final Word: Love

The overwhelming majority of older mothers do not regret what they've done. "Most people don't regret being born, and most people don't regret being a mother either," says one older mother with two young children. "Once they are there, you love them, and that's it. You sacrifice yourself, you do things you would never believe you were capable of for them, and you would die for them. And you love them with a kind of love that's completely different from anything else you've ever known. On the other hand, if any of us knew what lay ahead, who among us would ever be a mother?"