

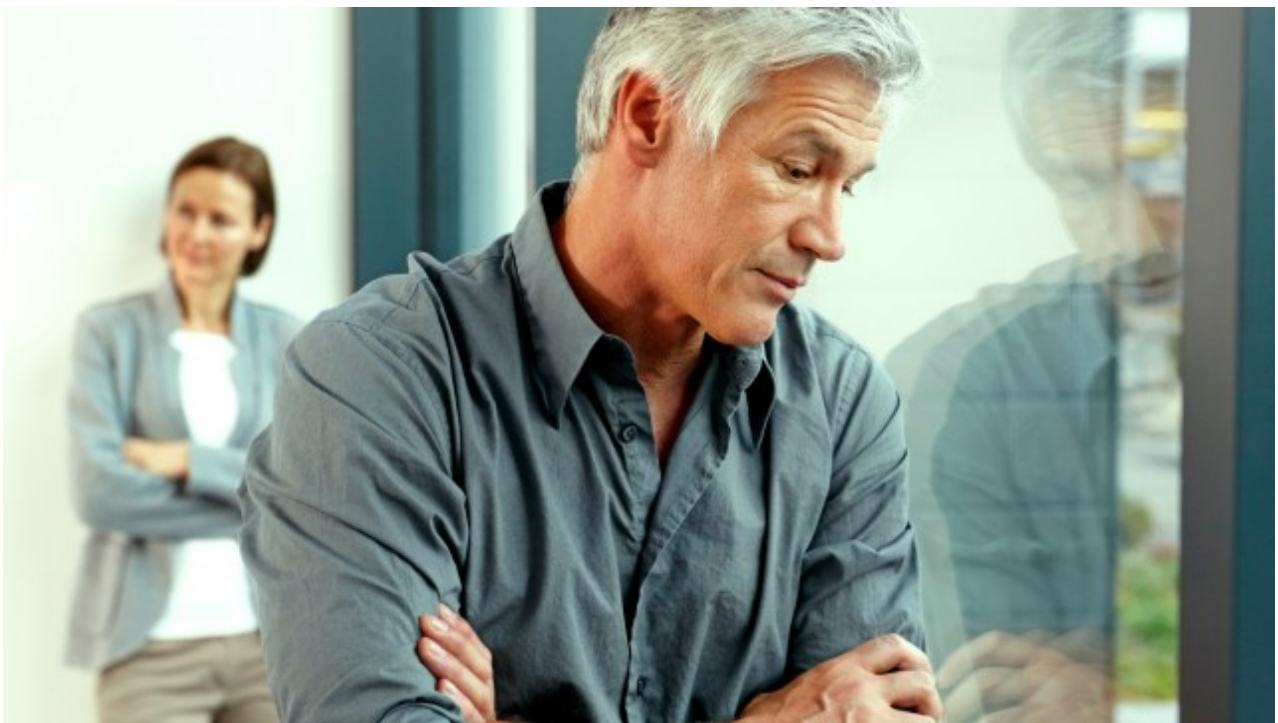
# I'm 55 and don't want another child – my much younger wife is heartbroken

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8 September 2023

Couples Therapy

**This week, couples counsellor and psychosexual therapist Cate Mackenzie weighs in on how to navigate conversations about future kids**



Big conversations like ones about having children should not be rushed (Photo: Getty Images)

By [i Team](#)

September 8, 2023 6:00 am(Updated 6:02 am)

Each week **i** asks experts to answer readers' questions about love, sex and relationships

I have three children from my first marriage and one with my second wife. I love all my children but I don't want any more. My wife does.

She is 15 years younger than me and feels strongly that she wants another and that our daughter should have a sibling. I am 55 now and do not want another child. I don't want to be 70 when my child is in senior school.

I have said this to her but she is heartbroken and I feel terrible. We are arguing about it constantly. If I don't do this I worry she will resent me forever – and if she backs me into a corner, I will resent her. How can we find a way through this?

## Couples counsellor and psychosexual therapist Cate Mackenzie says:

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This is a big issue and I can understand why you need help finding a way through this. It is not a great idea to feel guilt-tripped into having a baby and regretting another child but also your wife's feelings are important. The priority now is to find a way for both of you to talk calmly and clearly about your feelings and needs in this situation.

I imagine this could feel scary and overwhelming to both of you right now and it might be a help to work with a therapist. If that's not an option here are some of my recommendations about how to approach such an emotive and potentially triggering conversation.

First of all, agree on a time to talk when you are both as calm as you can be. It can be good to go out to a cafe or go on a walk. Be gentle and patient. When you meet, explain that you have been nervous to have the conversation as you didn't want to upset or hurt her. Explain how much she means to you. Tell her about your worries about having another child and the guilt and the impact this is having on you and also the impact on your connection together.

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I am curious about what your thoughts are about your child being in high school when you are 70? What in particular worries you about this? Did you have any conversations about how many children you would have when you first met and what were your agreements?

Give her space to talk about her feelings, fears and worries. I know it can be hard to sit with someone's anger and grief but please do your best to.

If either of you are tired or upset it may be worth revisiting the conversation another time – this will be a process, not a one-off conversation. It could be that you meet once a week to keep talking and listening.

Keep meeting and taking the time to appreciate each other, listen and talk until you both feel fully heard and understood. During this process amazing things may happen as you become more intimate and untie each other from “shoulds” and discover what is really there.

If this was a deal-breaker for your wife how would you feel? This is not to say that you should have a child to avoid her leaving but at this stage you need to explore all aspects of this situation. If you do definitely decide not to have a child then it would be important that you and your wife have a process to allow her grief and your remorse for her situation so that this does not remain an open wound in the relationship.

If remorse is genuinely felt and it is not a “thrown away” sorry then it can make a genuine healing between two people who cannot resolve a deep issue. This means: “I cannot take this step with you and I am truly sorry that this means you cannot have your dream of a sibling for our child. I imagine that may feel scary and devastating and deeply crushing and for that I am genuinely sorry. And I would like to find ways to amend this in ways that would mean something to you.”

There may be a way to honour your wife by acknowledging her needs and to create more connection with other children for your child and room for your wife’s grief – and maybe your child’s grief.

And on the flip side, if you did change your mind you will need to talk to your wife about how she can support your needs and wants and, as much as possible, allay your fears. Either way this is a big conversation and deserves time and space.

Please don’t rush this. People who rush over with a quick apology without doing the work can leave a gaping wound in the relationship that doesn’t go away. Whereas if you do this well you both may potentially feel so much closer and appreciate what you do have together.

*As told to Marianne Power*