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CHILD-FREE BY CHOICE

When babies simply don't fit the equation

BY PAT BURSON
STAFF WRITER

January 30, 2006

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BE UPFRONT WHILE DATING

If you're single and dating, the topic of children - to have them or not to have them - inevitably will come up.

If you don't want them, relationship and dating experts agree you should say so.

That's what James Richeson of Shirley does. A college student and manager at a retail store, Richeson, 26, tells his dates early on that, while he likes kids, he doesn't want one of his own.

"I just say it right out, right off the bat that that's not something I'm interested in. Not even a maybe," he says, adding that it's been easier since most of the women he dates seem to be like-minded - more interested in forging careers than making babies.

"Having children can be a deal-breaker for some relationships, so get it out and on the table early," says April Masini, a dating and relationship advice columnist whose latest book is "Think & Date Like a Man" (iUniverse, \$15.95).

Masini suggests raising the issue during the first or second date

"... when it's just the two of you and you have some time to talk, like right after coffee is served."

"By date three, if you haven't disclosed your interest in remaining child-free, you're officially withholding information," Masini says.

One way to gauge your date's interest in children is to ask about childhood experiences, says Donna Wade, co-author of "I Want a Baby, He Doesn't: How Both Parents Can Make the Right Decision at the Right Time" (Adams Media, \$12.95).

"If they don't want to talk too much, it raises a little bit of a flag," she says.

Or you can just pose the question, Masini says. Use "I" statements so that your date won't feel he or she is being interrogated or attacked.

Here's one example: "I don't mean to throw everything at you at once, but I really respect you and don't want to waste your time. I'm not really interested in having children - ever. How do you feel about that?"

Don't get stuck in a waiting game, thinking the other person eventually will change his or her mind - or that you could change it for them.

"One of the major things that I advise people about is that you cannot change another person," says Karen Sherman, a psychologist in Plainview who specializes in relationships. "Going into a relationship thinking you're going to change another person is really setting yourself up for a really big disappointment and problems in the relationship."

If one of you wants children and the other wants to remain child-free, Masini says you should accept that you're not compatible and move on.

"There are lots of fish in the sea - and a lot of them don't want to travel in schools, just couples," she says. "Find yours."

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