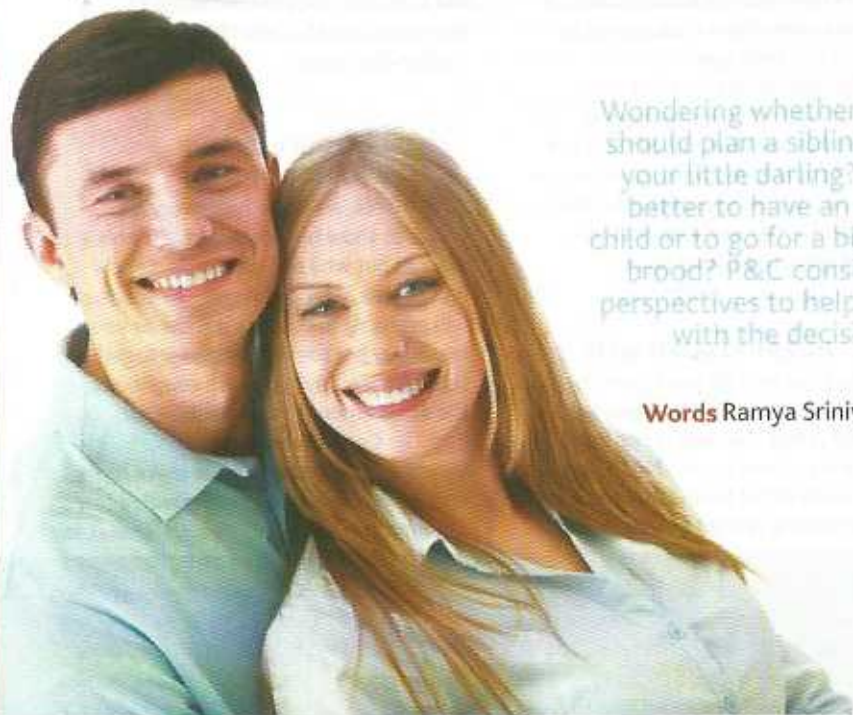


The one-two discussion



Wondering whether you should plan a sibling for your little darling? Is it better to have an only child or to go for a bigger brood? P&C considers perspectives to help you with the decision...

Words Ramya Srinivasan

There seems to be a widening difference of opinion between parents with a single child versus the ones with more than one. The arguments are unrelenting and they seem to be happening everywhere. From outside the school gates to family get-togethers to parties to social networking forums, the daggers seem to be drawn with each parent firmly believing his or her choice is the right choice. So, what really drives a parent to tilt one way or

the other? P&C talks to a few parents to learn more about their decisions.

"My husband and I were always clear we wanted two children. I am an only child but my husband shares a deep bond with his sisters. I wanted my children to have a similar sense of belonging. A sibling is the best gift one can give a child. I feel comforted with the thought that they would be around for each other even when we are not," explains Rishma

Garg, an IT sales manager from London. She continues, "Although the dynamics of being a parent have changed now unlike the previous generations and we are friendly and open with our kids, I do believe that siblings share a better sense of camaraderie and can open up to each other about topics that they would hesitate to do with parents. Simply put, it is equivalent to having a life-long friend who would care for you deeply."

Prathap, a software architect, concurs with Rishma and elaborates, "My brother and I always fought about everything as kids. But as we grew up, the bond has become stronger and we turn to each other for advice and support – financial and emotional. We may not talk every day and live in different parts of the world, but we know we are there for each other when there is a need. Our relationship has evolved into something special over the years."

Even parents who have a single child recall their childhood with their siblings fondly and swear they cannot imagine a life without them. But over the past decade, the percentage of single child families has almost doubled. Delhi-based National Council of Applied Economic Research states that 10 per cent of households are opting to have only one child, and nearly a quarter of college-educated women say they would prefer to have only one child. It is interesting to understand their psyche.

Every family is not the same and some relationships turn out special whereas some may not turn out that lucky. Ruth D'Souza, content writer and mum to a seven year old, says, "I am an only child to my parents and have never felt the need for a sibling. This idea of having a

second child to offer 'companionship' to the first one is highly overrated. So is the idea of a single child being a 'lonely' child. As a child, my mother ensured I had enough activities to keep me engaged. I have also been blessed to have truly caring friends. My husband, on the other hand, has three siblings but they share a detached relationship with each other."

Having a sibling does not always seem to 'guarantee' a companion for your child, as some parents vouch for. In some instances, sibling rivalries in childhood do not seem to stop even when grown up and the wavelengths are unmatched to the extent that the relationships fall out. Some parents who have had bitter experiences definitely



seemed to have opted for the 'single child' route. In some other cases, there is a lack of physical and mental readiness to take the plunge once again. As per census figures in 2012, 42.6 per cent of the Indian population opt for a second child only after three years of the birth of their first child.

"Just one year after my little one was born, I was already being quizzed about my plans for a second child," shares Pooja Mahesh, a freelance transcriber. "I was so exhausted with taking care of the baby and hardly felt settled into my role as a mother. I was not even sure if I wanted a second child. My first pregnancy was a horrible experience and I went through a series of health issues while expecting my little one. I had to be admitted to hospital more than once and was bedridden and there was a lot of stress on my family and me. I was reluctant to go through a similar experience again," confesses Pooja.

One parent shares about the health issues that her child had. "My little one was a colicky baby and I had sleepless nights through the initial years. After I got through that phase, I really needed some 'me' time just to collect myself again and focus on my work and that approach worked best for me. I understood and acknowledged my limitations as person and a mother," she says.

Falak, story educator and phonic trainer and mum to three-year-old Zoe agrees, "Health is a key reason. Having a single child does not mean being selfish! In today's world, when there is a lot of focus on career and parents struggle with help and support in a nuclear family setup, one needs to consider thoroughly on the preparedness for a second child.

Juggling between work and home is a battle even with just one child, so there is no point hurrying towards a decision that one is not ready for."

Aparna Chetan, entrepreneur and mum to a 16-year-old boy says, "One of the factors we considered was the financial viability. With one child, we were able to provide better care and the best of education. There is no 'single child syndrome' that he went through. As a matter of fact, he is a very responsible child and earns his pocket money by washing our cars!"

While health, financial and lack of family support have been key reasons to not go with a second child, sometimes it's just pure lack of interest or inclination. Falak responds with an edge, "While I am very happy to be mother to my little one, I just don't have the urge to go for a second child and will only go for it if I genuinely feel so, not because people are asking me about it or my little one needs a playing partner!"

The chemistry between married partners

also seems to alter with them turning into parents. A parent with a single child shares her experience, "I had a joint family setup and though I had a good support system, things were very difficult for us as a couple after the birth of our son. I felt like we were surrounded by too many people and too many opinions and my time with my husband became so rare. I was afraid that having another child would make it even worse. At times, I do tend to worry that my son will have to be solely responsible for his



parents, but it is something that I need to make peace with."

Another parent insists, "Ultimately, to each his own. I think our society has influenced our way of thinking to the extent that we have a mental image of an ideal and perfect life and are unfortunately forced to feel guilty if we don't fit into that framework. A family with two children is considered perfect. But who gets to decide what is perfect? Does it mean that someone who does not marry at all or a parent with just one or no child has an imperfect life? It is all a matter of perspective."

Another mum with two children gives her view on the other side of the fence

and laments the 'too much thinking' that parents do these days: "I think we have lost the Indian cultural touch of having a big family where everything revolves around relationships. Everyone seems to evaluate their decision so much in detail. My father had six siblings, and though there were plenty of issues between

them, they still backed each other in the crucial moments. I think at least two children is a must in each family."

She also explains, "Sharing is a key attribute that children with siblings learn naturally. They learn to cope with conflicts and how to resolve differences of opinion. They fight between themselves, but deal with it and move on. Having my second one has changed my first one a lot. He has become more caring and responsible towards

his sister and also towards myself and my husband. I have been advising my friends to go for a second one without hesitation and most of them have felt happy after doing so."

The arguments and the disagreements continue, but there seems to be a consensus on one thing – that it is based on the discretion of the parents. The good news is that perhaps there is no good or bad choice here. Experienced parents assure that the parenting style, the upbringing and the core values instilled matter more and that makes every child unique. Happy parenting! P&C

