

One-child families no longer object of pity, has certain advantages

There have been many myths surrounding the only child, and most people buy into at least a few of them. Over the past few decades, a number of studies have been done that have served to clarify the role of the only child in family and society.

Up until the 1960s, being an “only” was looked upon as a disadvantage, while in the past several decades the advent of birth control has made the idea of one wanted child less the object of controversy. Have the realities caught up with the myths? Try this quiz and find out.

1. For the past two decades, one-child families in the U.S. have outnumbered families with more than one child.

True () False ()

2. Only children are spoiled by their parents.

True () False ()

3. Only children often grow up as solitary, lonely creatures who prefer their own company.

True () False ()

4. A single child is much more likely than one with siblings to create an imaginary companion to keep him company.

True () False ()

5. Only children tend to always expect to get their way because they never have had to share.

True () False ()



Dr. Joyce Brothers

● Ask Dr. Brothers

6. Behavior problems in groups of children tend to be less among only children.

True () False ()

7. Parents of only children sometimes have a hard time keeping their expectations reasonable and letting go when it is time for the child to go off on his own.

True () False ()

Answers:

1. **True.** Although there has been a trend lately for extremely wealthy families to have a lot of children — four or even more — sometimes just to “show off” that they can afford to raise a lot of children and send them to college, the U.S. Census reports that the one-child family is the fastest-growing type of family unit in the country today. As a result, in recent years parents with one child are less likely to be pitied or scorned for having only an “only.”

2. **False.** The total number of toys, games and other goodies will most often be higher in families with more than one child than in

those with only one child. And typically, if an only child is successful in always getting his own way at home or forcing his parents to give him everything he wants, he will quickly be brought down to size by classmates when he gets to school.

3. **False.** Because the parents usually are keenly aware of the pitfalls of having a child grow up isolated,

parents of onlies usually quickly get their kids involved in play dates, group activities, music lessons, camp and sports. When they are left to play by themselves, onlies often develop their creative skills in order to make their time more interesting.

4. **False.** Many creative children invent a companion so that they can have a fabulous adventure that may not be available to them in real life — whether they have many siblings or none at all. Children who have a need for control, who are facing a fear or conquering loneliness, or who just want to feel stronger sometimes make up an imaginary friend because it is the only one they can find to listen and sympathize.

5. **False.** While there may be a tendency toward bossiness with a child who has very meek parents, there is nothing like a dose of other kids to quickly put him in his place. Regardless of the number of siblings, all kids must learn to live in a society with people of all different temperaments, and onlies are just as likely as others to back off if they are too self-centered to be popular among their peers.

6. **True.** Only children tend to be calmer and more obedient when it comes to group behavior. This may be because they have not had to compete with siblings by pushing, yelling louder or otherwise grabbing their share of the pie.

7. **True.** There are many checks and balances on the only child when he or she is thrust into social situations at school, and these go a long way toward compensating for a lack of siblings. It's often the parents who bear the brunt of the “only” experience. They need to be careful not to heap unrealistic expectations on the child, and they may have more trouble letting go as the child matures, since they have no other child coming up to “replace” him.

If you answered five or more of the questions correctly, you have a good understanding of today's only child in the family.

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Massachusetts lawmakers vote to ban gay marriage

BOSTON (AP) — In a suspense-filled final day of the legislative session, Massachusetts lawmakers kept alive a proposed constitutional amendment Tuesday that would put a stop to gay marriage in the only state that allows same-sex couples to wed.

The vote came after weeks of mounting legal and political pressure on legislators from both sides in the debate.

With a combination of parliamentary maneuvering, flip-flopping and brinkmanship, lawmakers gave the first round of approval necessary for the amendment to appear on the ballot in 2008. The measure still needs the endorsement of the next legislative session.

If the amendment makes it onto the ballot and residents approve it, it will leave Massachusetts' 8,000 existing gay marriages intact but ban any new ones.

“This is democracy in action. It's not a vengeance campaign. It's not a hate campaign. It's just an opportunity for the people to vote,” said Kris Mineau of the Massachusetts Family Institute, a conservative group that opposes gay marriage.

If lawmakers had failed to act on the amendment Tuesday, the measure would have died, and opponents of gay marriage who collected 170,000 signatures to try to put the issue on the ballot would have had to start over again.

The pressure on lawmakers came from all sides: Gay rights activists and Democratic Gov.-elect Deval Patrick called on the Legislature to let the measure die without a vote. Gay rights opponents — and Massachusetts' highest court — demanded an up-or-down vote.

The state Supreme Judicial Court — the same court that ruled in 2003 that gays have a constitutional right to marry — declared last week that lawmakers had shirked their constitutional duties by refusing to vote on an amendment submitted by the people. But the justices acknowledged they had no authority to force action.

To advance to the next round, the amendment needed the approval of only 50 of the 200 members of the Legislature. On Tuesday, 61 law-

makers voted in favor, while 132 were opposed.

A few hours later, the lawmakers agreed to reconsider. But then they largely affirmed the original result, with 62 voting in favor of the amendment.

Earlier in the day, the governor-elect, who supports gay marriage, met with the leaders of the Democratic-controlled Legislature to argue against a vote, calling it a “question of conscience.”

Patrick charged that the amendment process was being used to “consider reinserting discrimination into the constitution.”

“This is not just another question for popular decision. This is a question, under the equal protection clause, about what freedoms the minority is entitled to,” Patrick said.

Patrick takes the oath of office Thursday. His predecessor, Gov. Mitt Romney, a Republican who is considering a run for president, opposes gay marriage.

On Tuesday, crowds of gay marriage supporters and opponents returned to the Statehouse to press lawmakers on the issue.

Proponents of the amendment stood at the foot of the Statehouse steps with signs reading “Let the People Vote.”

“Legislators are sent to Beacon Hill to vote on a matter, not to not vote on a matter,” said one of the sign holders, Paul Ferro, 30.

Opponents of amendment stood on the opposite side of the street, in front of a Civil War memorial, with their own banners. “Let the people marry,” read one.

A person on the pro-gay marriage side held a sign that read, “Start Acting Like Christians.” An opponent of gay marriage yelled from across the street, “We are Christians, just like you!”

In November, seven states approved gay-marriage bans, joining 20 that had done so in previous elections.

Other states are moving in the opposite direction: New Jersey's gay couples gained new rights last week when the state legalized same-sex civil unions there. Vermont and Connecticut also allow civil unions.

Kansans take step toward carrying concealed guns

TOPEKA (AP) — Nearly 3,000 Kansas residents will be able to get their photos taken for their concealed-carry permits this week after receiving notice from the state that they have been approved to carry concealed weapons.

Last week the state mailed notices to 2,981 applicants telling them they have met the criteria for the permits.

The state's concealed-carry law went into effect July 1 after the Legislature overrode a veto by Gov. Kathleen Sebelius. The law allows qualified Kansans to obtain four-year concealed-carry permits, which can be issued beginning Monday.

Residents who wanted a permit were asked to submit applications at their county sheriff's office, which forwarded the paperwork to the attorney general's office.

Charles Sexson, who supervises the attorney general's unit that administers the new program, said Friday that the sheriff's offices have submitted 4,880 applications. The approval notices that went out last week primarily affected those whose applications were submitted between July and October.

Sexson said the state is still reviewing 1,899 applications, and that some are likely to be denied because the applicants have felony convictions.

“We'll probably send out another batch of approval notifications sometime after the first week or two of January,” he said.

To qualify, a person must be a Kansas resident and U.S. citizen at least 21 years old with no felony record. Applicants also must prove they have completed eight hours of approved training.

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