

Family christenings ... say no more. Wall-to-wall babies and you can guarantee that before too long, the conversation will swing to when it will be your turn.

School reunions ... these are reality versions of 'Revenge of the Nerds'. These reunions are a way to catch up with school mates from days past and brag about where you're up to in life. It's a chance to laugh at the school bully who has now advanced to Assistant Manager at the local McDonalds and wonder at the pimpled techno-geek who now owns a \$1 billion software firm. The downside is that you're spending the evening looking at photos of other people's children and explaining to each and every one of them why you don't have kids yet. And when you're competing for the title of biggest success story from your graduating class, admitting you've failed to have children can be hard.

"We always tried to entertain both sets of mums and just tried to get on with it. But as time went by, my wife had had enough and we ended up saying to the rest of the family, 'we'd rather go to your place than you come to ours' because it was really highlighted to her that her home was empty."

– Martin, 36

Mother's Day ... a time for recognising the women who have babies and fighting feelings of inadequacy because you're not a member of the club. Your partner will have a tough time with this one. She's on the outer of an exclusive club that she desperately wants to join. Draw a comparison here. If you lost your mother, Mother's Day would be hard for you – you've lost your mother and your reason to celebrate Mother's Day. Well, a woman in your situation has lost *her ability* to become a mother and her reason to celebrate Mother's Day. That's why it's hard for her. It's still a loss. It's just that if you lost your Mum, people would cut you some slack if you didn't want to participate in Mother's Day festivities. And Mother's Day is an in-your-face time when every TV station, newspaper, magazine and billboard has images of flowers and kids bringing mum breakfast in bed. Another thing is that it can be easy to feel on the outer because your partner is celebrating her mum, but no-one's celebrating her. Unfortunately, not too many people understand that, so when you say 'we're not coming to that Mother's Day lunch because it makes Sally upset', people can look at you sideways and go 'what's wrong with you?'

Father's Day ... same as above, but this time it's your pain. Many guys say it's not as bad for them as Mother's Day is for their partners, but it still annoys and hurts them.

Births, friends or family... due to the time of your life and the age group of those people around you, you will regularly hear the news that friends or family has a new baby. It can be hard. Your partner will no doubt feel this pretty deeply. She'll be asked to go to baby showers and christenings that she wants so much to be about her. Sometimes it's not easy to deal with her as well as your relationship with the new parents. It can make you feel like a rabbit in a spotlight - frozen on the spot and unsure of what to do next. If you participate in the celebrations, it will hurt. If you ignore them, you could hurt your friends or family deeply. Sometimes it can be a no-win situation.

Birthdays of children close to you ... new parents get a real kick out of putting on junior's first birthday. Just hearing about these little celebrations with junior and all of his little one-year old friends can be difficult.

Social get togethers ... some people find going to parties or barbecues at friends' houses difficult. This can particularly be the case if your social circle has more children than an Anne Geddes calendar.

SO WHAT'S IN THE TOOLBOX?

What can you do about these special occasions? As mentioned earlier, there is no one blueprint for dealing with these times. You just need to take each occasion on its merits. If there was one thing you can do to help your situation, keep talking with your partner. There will be events that she will want to avoid like the plague and discussing what is best for your sanity as individuals and a couple is critical.

You can counterbalance. You can survive a tough time that may last for three hours, but then go out to dinner or do something you enjoy together. Reward yourself. Focus on and celebrate the strengths of your relationship. Remember to balance out the challenging times with your own special celebrations of each other.