

Why I didn't circumcise my sons

parenting

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Will Robertson says he has no problem with circumcision, but wanted to "leave well enough alone" for his sons.

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Dad Will Robertson is circumcised, but chose not to circumcise his sons
- He says he and his wife decided to let their children "live as they were born"
- Robertson recalls a friend who underwent circumcision as an eighth-grader
- He says he could not subject his infant sons to excruciating pain

(Parenting.com) -- I am a 38-year-old father of two little boys living in Portland, Oregon, and I like my circumcised penis.

However, when it came time to decide the fate of my sons' own genitalia, my wife and I bucked the trend and let them live as they were born.

First, to be clear: I'm no "intactivist." I do not feel nearly that passionately about the subject. I have absolutely no problem with anyone who decides to circumcise his or her child. Tradition is powerful stuff.

And the [American Academy of Pediatrics's newly revised policy statement](#) will not, in my opinion, make the issue any clearer for expectant parents -- it remains artfully ambiguous. Yet, the revised policy does clearly state that the procedure should be covered by insurance. This will likely lead to greater access to circumcisions, which will surely be heralded by advocates.



German court bans circumcision

But for me, the decision came down to my penchant to leave well enough alone. I figure that nature knows better than I do about how to make a penis. That's it.

[Parenting: A history of circumcision](#)

I'm not worried about the hygiene issues that are potentially related to uncircumcised penises. They are minor and rare. Besides, my boys are lucky enough to be able to bathe in clean water just about every day. I'll take the time to show them how to clean themselves just as the parent of a little girl must teach her to wash her vagina carefully.

Considering that some estimate a 1.5 percent complication frequency rate among newly circumcised infants, I'm OK with my boys' risking the infrequent urinary tract infection.

There is, I suppose, a slightly higher risk of HIV transmission and other sexually transmitted infections for uncircumcised males. But I trust that I'll be able to convey the importance of proper condom use when my boys reach the appropriate age.

[Should teens make circumcision decision?](#)

Before the birth of my first son, most of the parental backyard barbecue banter dealt with either aesthetics or tradition. Who was going to opt for the knife -- and why -- had a lot to do with personal preference, it seemed. Practical health issues and religious adherents were rarely, if ever, discussed.

Either the men were adamant that their son look like them or they just didn't care if they didn't. There was some talk among the women about whether circumcised penises were "cuter" than uncircumcised penises. They couldn't agree. While amusing, I did not find any real substance in these discussions.

There is also an argument to be made that circumcision, in effect, mutilates the genitals of a minor without their consent, which strikes me as neither fair nor particularly holistic.

I can't help but wonder if the practice of male circumcision, as with female genital mutilation, has something to do with a fear of human sexuality and a desire to control.

A stretch? Perhaps. But it is interesting to note that the Netherlands sure doesn't think so: In 2010, the Royal Dutch Medical Association stated that non-therapeutic male circumcision "conflicts with the child's right to autonomy and physical integrity." They went as far as to claim that there are as many good reasons for prohibition of male circumcision as there are for female genital mutilation.

[Parenting: Why I decided to circumcise my sons](#)

I had a good friend who chose to get circumcised when we were in the eighth grade. I

believe that he was solely motivated by pressure to look like his male peers.

He was out of school for a week. I remember him telling me about the excruciating pain associated with the procedure. He was in pain for at least a week post-operation.

Adolescents like to exaggerate, but I believed him.

I remembered this anecdote when it came time to make the decision for my sons. I did not have any desire to subject my beautiful baby boys to excruciating pain, even with analgesia.

The thought of forcing them to endure another traumatic experience right after birth seemed cruel.

[Parenting: How a circumcision is actually performed](#)

Besides, the perception of what a "normal" penis should look like is rapidly changing. Our doctor here in Portland informed my wife and me that the circumcision rate was nearing 30% locally -- a far cry from the approximately 80% rate of the 1960s.

Thirty percent is a lot closer to the global ratio. So, even if we move away from Portland someday (and go ahead, make all the Portlandia jokes you want), the likelihood that my boys' penises will be accepted is pretty high.

The day will come when one of my boys will want to know why his penis is different than mine. It hasn't happened yet although the oldest is only 3. When it does, I will look him in the eye and tell him that people did things differently when I was born -- no big deal.

[Parenting: Boy parts -- and what to do with them](#)

This story was originally published on [Parenting.com](#):

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The opinions expressed in this commentary are solely those of Will Robertson.