

Living with childlessness



Fertility New Zealand is a registered charity supporting people with fertility issues

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INFORMATION | SUPPORT | ADVOCACY

If you're reading this, it probably means you're starting to think about where you draw the line on family creation and fertility treatment, or perhaps you've had the line drawn for you, and you're trying to figure out what next, in a society where so much of your identity – and community life – focuses around traditional family structures and the role of being a mother or father.

Where to next?

A variety of circumstances may have led you here – from medical issues, to not having the right social support or meeting your partner at the right time, to practical issues like the eye-watering financial expense of assisted fertility treatment. It is also likely that the emotional toll of having your life in limbo for too long and managing the emotional rollercoaster of infertility has taken up much of your time and energy. However you arrived at this point, we are saddened that it has not worked out as you hoped.

Reaching the point of having to contemplate, and then plan for a future without children, isn't easy. The sense of loss you may be feeling can be hard to describe to others who often don't know how to respond. You may even find that you find that those that have been part of this experience with you, process the loss differently and might be out of sync with the emotions you are feeling.

Dealing with grief

What you might be feeling is the full range of emotions that occur quite normally with grief. When we contemplate a life without children, we realise that some of the experiences we were looking forward to are going to be more difficult to

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be achieved or may not be possible in the way we hoped. So it's normal to feel frustrated, sad, or even angry as you move through the grief associated with all the losses of your fertility journey. Please be kind to yourself through this process and reach out for help, especially when you are feeling stuck or overwhelmed in your grief. It's important to also remember that there is no time frame on grief and there will always be reminders of your loss and waves of emotions that come along from time to time. These emotions usually feel less intense and more manageable over time.

Drawing the line itself can be confronting and enormously challenging. It can also feel like a relief from the unrelenting uncertainty of infertility and the challenging obligations of treatment. You might be feeling guilty about not being able to face more treatment or hoping for a miracle game changer. Your 'limit' might be different to others or you might be wondering whether you've done enough so that you can move forward without regret. Others may suggest that if you really wanted a child then you would do more – whatever it takes – ►

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◀ to become a parent; and perhaps imply that by not continuing to turn your life upside down you don't deserve that privilege. Take some time to make the decision you feel is the best decision you can make for your unique situation. None of us have a crystal ball and hence we can only do what we believe is the best thing at any point in time in our lives. If you give yourself time and support to make the decision, chances are you won't regret the decision, but it will still be normal to feel sad about the outcome.

Strength and resilience

If you have a partner, this is likely to be a challenging time for both of you, especially as partners often arrive at decision points at different times. If your partner has an infertility diagnosis,

they may feel guilty for your loss. Even the strongest relationships are challenged by fertility journeys, and we encourage couples to seek counselling to navigate this transition.

The strength and resilience you've shown so far is exactly what will support you as you create a new future. It will be different to the one you had imagined, but when you are ready for it, that same strength and courage will help you step forward to welcome new possibilities, probably many that you hadn't considered before. Be kind to yourself, expect some grief “speed-humps”, and know that you're not alone in your transition. There is a community of strong and courageous individuals and couples that managed to draw the line, step over of it, and have found happiness in possibilities they hadn't previously considered. Kia kaha. ■

Please note that the information presented in this brochure is intended only as a brief summary. For specific advice on your particular medical situation you should always consult your professional health care provider.
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