

Women Without Children

Recently a few women talked with me about a serious concern they had. The common factor among these women was that they all had no children. Their concern was that their friends, co-workers, and sometimes family members would say unkind things to them or made their own ridiculous conclusions why they did not have children. A few months would not pass without someone saying to them something like this: "You need to have a child so you can be happier." These women said that it is very difficult to convince everyone that they are happy and do not want children.

Why do so many of us conclude something negative when people do not have children? It seems by default that a woman without children is incomplete, as a man without children is queer. What absurdity! Mothers who've had miscarriages or still births also experience similar responses from their family members or friends. I actually heard someone remarked to a mother who recently lost a baby through miscarriage these words: "You must have done something wrong to cause this to happen to you." Here's another: "Child, my mother never had a miscarriage." This is to suggest that her family's wombs are of better quality.

One preacher said the gift of tongues is sometimes in silence. If we do not have anything positive to say during times of pain or loss, say nothing. Keep you big mouth shut. Why are so many humans so insensitive and judgmental? The tongue is the most dangerous weapon on earth. It cuts, stabs, and destroys individuals, families, and nations. In sacred scripture there are power statements about this. James 3:8 says, "But no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison." In Psalm 52:2 (NIV) we read, "You who practice deceit, your tongue plots destruction; it is like a sharpened razor." Here are two texts demonstrating how good the tongue can be if used wisely. Proverbs 12:8: "There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing;" and Proverbs 25:11: "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver." Let us use the tongue to bless and not to curse; to heal and not to wound. Many may have to go to their relatives or friends and apologize for being so cold, mean and judgmental. Many may just need to start accepting their childless relatives unconditionally.

While preparing this article, I came across a Huffington Post essay published May 25, 2015, entitled "7 Appeals To Moms From Women Without Children." I found it intriguing and reflecting my own thoughts. As a result, I will share the high points of the article with you. The essay is the result of writer H el ene Tragos Stelian's interview with women who reach midlife without children. Here are the seven points she discovered from these women.

1. **Don't ask me why -- or assume you know why.** This is important. Note it says "don't ask 'why?'" Stelian wrote: "Women don't have children for a myriad of reasons, and they're really none of our business. If and when they choose to talk about their journeys, they will do so, on their own terms. The "Why?" question is particularly insensitive for women who wanted children but, whether for medical or other reasons, could not have them." Some women have spent decades and thousands of dollars trying to have a baby. Making remarks or asking questions can often be insensitive and wrong.
2. **Don't pity me.** "For some women, the lack of children is a real wound that never completely heals. Still, by midlife, the women I interviewed who had longed for children had come to terms with their situation. And the last thing they want is pity. On the contrary, they want us to know that they live happy and productive lives and that we can talk about our kids with them."
3. **Don't judge me.** The writer shares: "Children are not for everyone. Yes, there are women who don't yearn to carry or mother a child. All they ask is that we respect their personal choice,

just as they accept ours.” I have actually interviewed teenagers who do not want to have children, and they are serious about it. Let us respect that choice and not insinuate that they are doing an injustice to the world or themselves by choosing not to have children

4. **Don't assume I don't like kids.** Wow! This is a great one. Why do we think if someone does not want to have children of her own that she does not like children? This is often far from the truth. H  l  ne Tragos Stelian said that “most of the women I interviewed very much enjoy spending time with other people's children. They are special aunties to their siblings' kids. They spend time with their partner's children from a former relationship. They volunteer with children's charities.
5. **Don't exclude me.** Too often we do not know how to relate to women without children, so we leave them out of the family party or other event. Sometimes we think that since they do not have children, being around children would not be good for them. This is a mistake. Include them
6. **Don't call me childless.** This one I thought is so important. The author shared that while many of the interviewees did not want to get caught up in the terminology, the majority agreed . . . “that the word childless implies something is lacking.” It's a negative. For the women who chose not to have children, this is particularly offensive. As to better wording, some liked "child free" while others felt it was too forced, trying too hard to be politically correct.”
7. **Don't be rude.** As I mentioned earlier, far too many can really be rude to mothers without children. The author gathered a list of statements not to say to women without children. These statements are downright rude.

"You don't really understand what it means to be a woman until you've had a child."

"You should have had children. You're so great with them."

"Having kids was the best thing I ever did."

"Who will take care of you when you're old?"

"Didn't you want to have children?"

"Don't you like children?"

"I bet you regret not having children."

"You could have adopted. Why didn't you?"

"Oh, so you chose a career over having children."

If you used any of these statements go now and bring healing to your family and relationships. Ask for forgiveness. Say "I am sorry for being so mean with my tongue."

If you are a women who has been wounded by the tongue of others look in the mirror each day and say "I am happy just being me."

Barrington H. Brennen, MA, NCP BCCP, is a marriage and family therapist and board certified clinical psychotherapist, USA. Send your questions or comments to barringtonbrennen@gmail.com or write to P.O. Box CB-13019, Nassau, The Bahamas, or visit www.soencouragement.org or call 242-327-1980 or 242-477-4002.