



MISCARRIAGE
ASSOCIATION

The knowledge to help

When the trying stops



For some people, there comes a time when they begin to think about stopping their attempts to have a baby.

This can be difficult enough for people who already have a child or children and who want very much to complete their family. But it can be an especially difficult and painful decision for those who are childless.

There are all sorts of reasons that people consider stopping trying:

- repeated losses
- fertility problems
- increasing age
- social, financial or relationship issues.

If you are thinking that you might stop trying to have a baby, especially if it means remaining childless, this leaflet is written for you.¹

“Even after the first miscarriage I could still see us as being a family of four (or more) but after the fourth, this dream/vision is constantly fading and I don’t know if I can see it any more.”

Thoughts about stopping

You might have been thinking for some time about stopping your attempts to have a baby, or the thought might have suddenly come into your mind.

You may feel that you have come to the end of the line medically, or simply feel that you can take no more – physically, emotionally or even financially. Your hopes and dreams of a baby may seem less and less likely. And you might find it harder and harder to cope with any further loss and with the roller-coaster of hope followed by disappointment.

All of those things can make the thought of trying again more of a dread than something to look forward to.

Even so, it can be scary to let yourself think about not trying again – about how life would be if you stopped trying. You might feel that it is somehow a betrayal of the baby or babies that you have lost.

It can take time – and courage – to face these feelings and to achieve some kind of acceptance which will allow you to move on.

¹ By “you” we usually mean both the person who has had the physical loss/es and their partner. But sometimes we’re addressing just the person who was pregnant.

Making the decision

For some people, there comes a clear moment at which they make the decision to stop trying. But for many people, it's a process, with twists and turns along the way. You may decide and un-decide more than once as your feelings shift back and forth.

It's a normal and understandable reaction as you think about facing a different kind of future from the one you were planning.

A different kind of loss

Stopping your attempts to have a baby can bring its own sense of loss.

It's very likely that you have spent many months if not years trying to get pregnant and stay pregnant. When you stop trying, it opens up a new space, one that used to be filled with hopes and plans for a future with children. That can feel like another kind of loss.

“We've become more relaxed and trying to make babies isn't our priority any more. It is so nice not to keep looking at the calendar any more.”

You may become aware that when the trying stops, so does the medical care that you have had. Even though they may have been difficult and distressing, hospital or GP appointments at least provided something to focus on. You might wonder how you will fill that gap.

But you might also have an unexpected feeling of relief. No more decisions to be made; no more fingers crossed when finding out you are pregnant; no more anxious days and weeks, waiting for a scan; no more medical intervention when things go wrong.

“Hope has gone and that leaves a simple fact: it is not going to work. There is something straightforward and clean in that. I have had enough of this. I realise hope is what has made this so painful but now it is gone, somehow it is easier.”

A different future

Thinking of facing a life without children, or without completing your family, can raise many new questions – from what to do with your weekends, to what to do with your life.

It may affect your relationship with your partner, perhaps bringing you closer together. But it might make you question your future as a couple. You may decide to get some professional help so you can talk and think this through (see page 7).

You are likely to find that the raw feelings of loss ease over time. There may still be a continuing sadness, perhaps especially on particular dates

and occasions, but there can also be some comfort in remembering the brief life of your baby or babies.

“ I feel my family is complete now. Just my husband and me and our memories of the tiny lives we had with us for a short while. ”

Above all, you may find some relief in closing the door on ‘trying’ and allow yourself to think about moving on to a different kind of future from the one you had planned.

“ I loved each one of those lives so deeply and profoundly, they remain with me for ever. I shall celebrate their presence in my life whilst also mourning the fact it was so short. ”

Moving on

After making the decision to stop trying, people move on with their lives in all sorts of different ways.

Some explore different ways of becoming a parent, such as fostering or adoption. Some consider caring for older children or those with special needs.

Others may decide to move on without directly parenting and become more involved with their nephews and nieces or the children of friends. Although this might be painful at times, being part of a child's life can also bring much happiness. In the same way, working with a charity involving children can bring great satisfaction and fulfilment.

You may choose to build a different life, without a focus on children. Not having children means you might be more flexible in the way you live your life and you can perhaps find time and energy for other things. Closing the door on trying can mean opening another door to other interests and opportunities.

“ I don't think you ever give up hope of having your own child until nature prevents it, but we've learned to come to terms with it. The thought of looking after children that have had a disadvantaged start makes life seem even more worthwhile. ”

Even if you stop trying, there may still be times when it's difficult to be around other people with children, especially if they seem to be the main topic of conversation. You might find it helps to spend more time with others who don't have children or whose children have grown up.

“ I was physically and emotionally unable to contemplate going through any more miscarriages, but I still had an overwhelming urge to be a Mum. For my husband and me, the need to be parents continued and we found ourselves starting to discuss the possibility of adoption. ”

Talking to others who have faced the same issues as you can also be helpful.

You can use our online support forum to share your thoughts and feelings with others in a similar situation.²

You might also find it helpful to read others' stories about stopping trying.³

Above all, moving on is a journey – one of finding and building a new life and a different sense of identity and purpose. It can be hard to get through that journey and you might find that you and your partner deal with it very differently. Sadly, some relationships don't survive this change in direction – but many do and are strengthened by it.

Summary

The decision to stop trying for a baby is rarely an easy one. The life you are facing is a very different one from the one you had hoped and wished for and the process of adapting to that new life is likely to take some time.

You are very likely to make and un-make decisions several times before you finally decide on the way ahead. And even if your decision is clear and strong, you may still have times when you wish it were otherwise and times of great sadness at what might have been.

It is important to know that you are not alone and there are many resources available to help you and/or your partner come to the right decision for you. Hopefully they can help you move towards a positive future.

“ I realised that I had choices. I could aim higher at work, take on new responsibilities and challenges instead of avoiding them ‘just in case’. I could even change direction completely and do something different. ”

² See www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk/miscarriage-forum/.

³ See www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk/information/your-stories/.

Resources

The Miscarriage Association

offers a staffed helpline with live chat, email and direct messaging; in-person and online support groups and telephone volunteers; an online forum and private Facebook groups. www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk

Fertility Network UK

A national network offering support for, amongst other topics, those facing the challenges of childlessness. www.fertilitynetworkuk.org

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy

Has information about counselling and a list of registered counsellors. www.bacp.co.uk

Relate

offers a counselling and support service for couples and individuals who are having relationship problems. www.relate.org.uk

The Samaritans

Tel 116 123 (freephone); www.samaritans.org
24 hour helpline when you need someone to talk to.

Something to read:

Beyond Childlessness: for every woman who ever wanted to have a child and didn't

Black, Rachel and Scull, Louise.
Rodale International Ltd, London 2005.
ISBN: 1-4050-7761-1

“The sadness has moved from being a heavy burden that weighed me down to a gentler, kinder sorrow. It is a precious bit of me that I am glad is there – it's the special bit that connects me to my babies.”

Need to talk to someone who understands?

Call our support line on: 01924 200799. Monday to Friday, 9am-4pm
Chat with us online at www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk
Or email: info@miscarriageassociation.org.uk



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The knowledge to help

The Miscarriage Association

T: 01924 200799

E: info@miscarriageassociation.org.uk

W: www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk

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