

Learning to Dance

Steps to Childless Acceptance



Participant's Guide

Learning to Dance

Steps to childless acceptance

Welcome

"Learning to Dance – Steps to childless acceptance" is a workshop for women and men who are childless. While not all of us are great dancers (myself included), I think on a basic level we all enjoy moving to music. It is one of the most basic forms of expression. There is something about dancing! Even if you have two left feet, it is a liberating joyful experience. It is a way of speaking and doing without words and communicating in a new way. As childless women and men, we need that!

Thank you for joining us on this journey toward freedom and acceptance of your childlessness. You will find that while living a life without having children is not what we had planned for ourselves, when we “learn to dance”, it will be a liberating, expressive experience. It is our hope that you leave this workshop with tools to living a better and happier life than what you have lived.



Learning to Dance

About me

Ever since I was a child, I knew I wanted a family of my own one day. The years came and went, I got an education. I didn't get married so, I went to work overseas. After two years I returned home and completed a Masters' degree. After that, I got a job, began to work. Marriage didn't happen for me for a while and it wasn't for lack of trying. Then, I was finally blessed with a wonderful man and married at the age of 40. My husband and I tried to start a family of our own right away, but it never happened. I clung to Bible verses hoping for the miracle that would never come "With God all things are possible." (Luke) "Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart." (Psalms) etc. I comforted myself with these words. After three miscarriages and six failed IVF attempts, the realization that we would never have children of our own became a painful reality. On top of it all, by the end of our journey we were deemed too old to adopt.

After the initial shock and denial, I began to feel depressed, alone, bitter and angry. This is not the life I had planned for myself. I went back and forth between deep depression and self-medication – all the while, having to put on a brave face and somehow function, somehow keep it together when everyone around me was living my dream.

Now, I am slowly embracing and accepting this life that God has given me. I am beginning to understand that everything happens for a purpose. It's still a journey, triggers can come like a freight train and plunge me into deep sadness again but I am becoming stronger and it is getting better. I am on my way to claiming my Plan B.

While my life is not what I imagined, I am learning to feel at peace and I am learning to dance. Will you join me?

Mary Gorombey

Learning to Dance

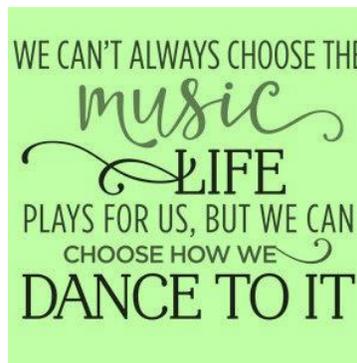
Who is this for?

This workshop has been developed for women and men who are infertile or childless by circumstance - seeking support and a way forward. Together we will embark on a journey of support and healing enabling us to become the whole people God intended us to be.

It is for those childless women and men (couples and singles) who find they need to share their stories, discover their value in society, release their pain and grief and find a way to cope and move forward. The participants would be those individuals with no children and for whom the chapter of their lives on having or trying to have children is closed. This is not a workshop for those still trying to conceive, nor is it one for those experiencing secondary infertility (those who have a child but cannot conceive or give birth to another).

Why?

As Christians, we have to come to accept that all things happen for a purpose. Letting go of what we thought was our purpose and re-identifying it is extremely challenging and also empowering. God does not desire to see us in pain and suffering. He does not want us to feel incomplete. He wants to dance with us. Together we must find ways to recognize our pain, unburden ourselves and share the journey of healing. We must adjust our life's choreography because we are valuable and precious to God. He has a purpose for our lives and He can do great things. **He wants to fill our dance card!**



Learning to Dance

When to do the workshop?

The workshop can be held any time that is convenient for the participants. They would need to commit to participating in the full workshop. A suggestion might be to have the workshop sometime in the fall. Thanksgiving and Christmas are especially difficult holidays for those who are childless. Learning how to cope in advance of these events may help participants survive the holidays with their emotions and their sanity relatively in-tact

The workshop should run for two full days. A suggestion might be two Saturday mornings (leaving a week between meetings). Each day will last for approximately 5 hours with breaks.

Where? Place and space?

The ideal location of this workshop should be a comfortable and warm non-threatening place. Since the workshop is geared toward Christians, a church room can be this. However, a room in a community centre may also be suitable. If a church room is used, care must be taken to avoid the use of children's Sunday school rooms and in the interest of safety, care must be also taken to avoid sharing the space with other programs i.e. especially Mom's and Tots, Kid's clubs etc. If possible, a room above grade would be best. The room should have natural light. It should fit 15-20 people comfortably allowing for room to move around for some of the activities. There should be tables available to perform writing activities. The room should be able to be darkened so that viewing a projection of a short clip would be possible. Walls should be such that paper can be stuck on them.

Food and beverages should be provided. Not only is it welcoming and demonstrates hospitality, it is practical as a 6-hour day without food and drink can be long and perhaps even unsafe for people with medical conditions requiring them to eat. It is up to the organizers to determine if lunch will be provided but it might be a good idea. Breaking bread together will encourage fellowship among the participants. If it will not be provided, that needs to be communicated to the participants in advance.

Desired Outcome

This workshop will aim to give you a place to learn of your value to God, to society, and to yourselves. By the end of the workshop you will:

- Improve your ability to **identify** and **express** your feelings about your childlessness.
- Be encouraged to **move** toward **changing** your negative feelings about yourself into positive ones, affirmed by Biblical truths.
- Be better able to **share** your stories and to **unburden** yourself.
- **Engage** in an exercise to help you **release** your grief.
- Will be better equipped with coping strategies to manage stressors and your reactions to them.
- **Experience** a safe place where you and others experiencing childlessness can **build** community.
- **Learn** to better **let go** of your negativity and **move forward**.
- Be on your way to **creating** your “Plan B”.
- **Receive** support on your journey of childlessness.



Looking Ahead

- Day 1 Warm up – the pain of never
- Examining views of childlessness
- “The Pain of Never”
- Learning to share our story
- Grief discussion and activity
- Day 2 Check in, review
- Adjusting your tune
- Coping with stressors
- Moving forward re-establishing harmony
- Developing our Plan B
- Finding our support network

Day 1

You are not alone. Warm up Activity (5 minutes)

(In pairs) What do you think when you hear these words said in relation to your inability to have had a child? Do you believe them? Why or Why not?

Did you know?

- That 1 in 6 Canadians experience infertility ((What is infertility?, 2018)
- **That our generation** boasts the most childless adults since the First World War? (The Rise of Childlessness, 2017)
- Famous childless men and women include: Jane Austen, Milton and Catherine Hershey, Evangeline Booth (daughter of William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army), Rosa and Raymond Parks (civil rights heroine)
- **That** a German study found that 42% of charitable foundations were created by childless people. (The Rise of Childlessness, 2017)

(As a group) How you feel after reading these facts?

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The Pain of Never

1. **(Solo activity)** Which of the reasons for childlessness apply to you? Circle all that apply. (2 minutes)

You never met the right person

You were building a career

You weren't sure if you wanted kids

You married late

You were diagnosed with endometriosis

You were diagnosed with cancer

You had health issues affecting your fertility

You have unexplained infertility

List any reasons that aren't listed in the box below if you wish.

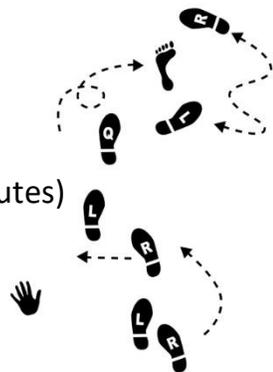
2. **(As a group)** Watch the brief clip of Jessica Hepburn produced by The Fertility Network UK. (5 minutes) as she describes the "Pain of Never".

#Hidden Faces - The Pain of Never: Jessica Hepburn

<https://youtu.be/5OEDYZ19EuE>

- a. **(Solo)** As you watch, consider what you feel about what she says. Jot them down in the space provided. (2 minutes)

- b. **(As a group)** Share your feelings with the group if you wish. (5 minutes)



(In Pairs) How do you feel about your childlessness? 10 minutes



Being a mother gives me edge on May — Leadsom

Tory minister says she will be better leader because childless home secretary lacks 'Make in future'



Career focus: Angela Langton

'MY WORK IS MY FAMILY'

ANGELA Langton said her two businesses 'are effectively like children'.

The 41-year-old runs her own Italian restaurant in Bridlington, Yorkshire, and has an online company selling corsets.

She said: 'I do like kids but I said from a very young age that I wouldn't have children.'

'Until 2005 I worked as a business adviser but I was told by male colleagues that I should be at home having babies. I left and decided to set up on my own.'

Miss Langton, who is single,

'IT JUST NEVER HAPPENED'

ANGELA Kane expected to have children, but 'time just slipped by'.

Now 43, Miss Kane, from Chadwell Heath in Essex, said she devoted herself to her job as a paralegal for a City law firm during her 30s.

She added: 'I was in a relationship in my 20s but that ended and in my 30s time went by without me realising. I thought there would be kids but it just never happened.'

'I earned a good salary and it was completely consuming. Women didn't have the option to have a full

- Take a moment and write down your feelings. How do you feel society and the media portrays the childless?
- How do you feel people view **you** when they discover you are childless?
- How do you feel about your childlessness? List any words or phrases that come to mind.

Did you know?
Less than a year and a half ago, in England, during the British election campaign, Andrea Leadsom while campaigning against Theresa May stated that in comparison to her rival May who is childless, being a mother "means you have a very real stake in the future of our country". Therefore she would be a better Prime Minister.
How do reports such as this make you feel?

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Sharing your story

Take a moment and reflect on all the feelings that you are experiencing at this time. You must have memories coming to mind. Painful times. We all have been through a lot and you probably feel totally alone in your pain. There is no one who can listen to your story, there is no one who truly understands why you can't go to a friend's baby shower, why you cut off relationships with some friends, why you avoid church, why Family Day, Mother's Day, Father's Day are holidays that cause great sadness.

There is no one around you who has been through what you have, and you don't have anyone in your support network who truly understands. You hurt, and you have no one to whom you can tell your story.

We have no role models to look to, to help us do be childless but we have each other here today and we owe it to ourselves to unload our burden. We've been carrying it too long. When we unburden ourselves, we will be free to dance our dance.

In the next exercise, we will share our stories. The taboos that have kept us silent need to be broken - Because we matter.



River of Life exercise

Drawing your river of life (20 minutes)

1. (Solo) Take a sheet of flip-chart paper and use coloured markers and pencils found on your tables.

Draw a picture of a river with parts of the river representing stages in your infertility journey.

The River can have twists and turns representing deviations from the life you expected.

The River can also have obstacles (rocks, barriers – these can be events, people, circumstances) but it can also have flowers and trees along the bank or whatever you wish to represent the happy, hopeful times.

2. (Duet or Trio) **Sharing your story (15 minutes)**

Share your River of Life story in groups of 2 or 3.

3. (As a group) **Come together as a large group and reflect on the activity. (5 minutes)**

Did you notice any threads between your story and those of your group? How does that make you feel?

Do you find it easier to be understanding and compassionate towards the other members of the group and their stories than you are towards yourself and your own story? Why?

Where do you see God in your story?



Gwen Meharg - Dancing at the Crossroads

<http://www.drawneartogod.com/ArtDetail.asp?ID=200206006&art=dancing-at-the-cross-roads-freedom-series#.WstmwtWYdU>

Grief



Useful definitions

Grief – the period of time following the death of a close friend or relation. It is a physical, cognitive, emotional and behavioural process

Disenfranchised grief - is a term describing grief that is not acknowledged by society. It is not considered “real grief” by society. It is a loss of something you never had or the loss of potential. Miscarriage is considered this kind of loss.

Identifying our losses

(Solo) Looking back at your river of life drawing, **identify the personal losses** you have experienced. How did you grieve them? 5 minutes

(In pairs or threes) Looking back at your infertility journey, **identify your fertility losses**. How did you grieve them? (7-8 minutes)

(As a group) Are there any differences between grieving your infertility and grieving the loss of someone? If you didn't grieve your infertility losses, why not? (7 minutes)

Stages of Grief

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross in her famous book On Death and Dying (Kubler-Ross, 1993) describes 5 stages of grief: **denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance** – While not the only theory out there and certainly one that is contested, it is still one of the most prominent. The illustration below may help describe the stages.

(In Pairs) (10 minutes) **Take a moment and think.**

Using the handout entitled: **Stages of Grief and Childlessness**. How do these stages apply to grieving your infertility? Write your examples on the handout. Share with your partner.

Where do you feel that you are in your grief process?

"Normal" Functioning

Shock and Denial

- Avoidance
- Confusion
- Fear
- Numbness
- Blame

Anger

- Frustration
- Anxiety
- Irritation
- Embarrassment
- Shame

Depression and Detachment

- Overwhelmed
- Blahs
- Lack of Energy
- Helplessness

Return to Meaningful Life

- Empowerment
- Security
- Self-Esteem
- Meaning

Acceptance

- Exploring options
- A new plan in place

Dialogue and Bargaining

- Reaching out to others
- Desire to tell one's story
- Struggle to find meaning for what has happened

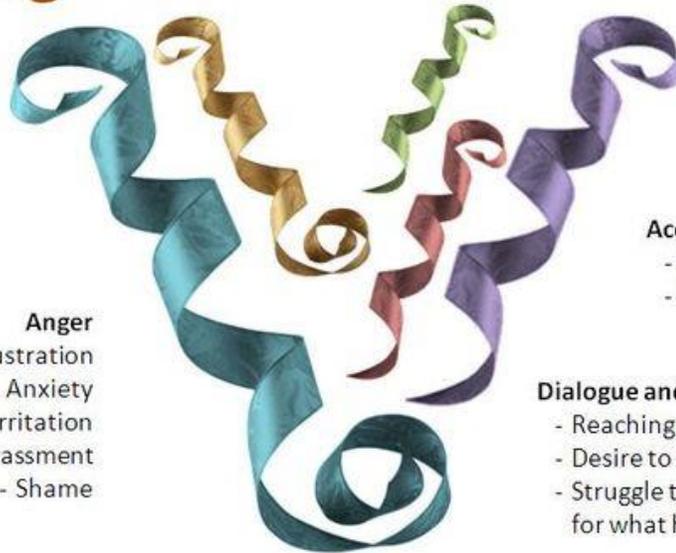


Image obtained from: https://www.markzauss.net/uploads/2/5/7/4/25743729/9859256_orig.jpg?373

Stages of Grief and Childlessness.

Stages of Grief	How does this stage apply to your infertility?
Denial	
Anger	
Bargaining	
Depression	
Acceptance	

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Grieving your infertility. 10 minutes

Read the following excerpt from Jody Day's book Living the Life Unexpected describing fertility grief:

It is a:

"narrow cramped, claustrophobic space that gets more cramped as each year passes. Made for one. The only view ahead is a narrow shaft of light, somewhere off in the distance. And behind you in the dark is every wrong decision, every failed relationship, every missed opportunity. " it is "a lonely pressurized place where you can't turn round, can't reverse, can't go sideways. And your only guide in this fetid space? The polarized opinions of your others and your own. " It's the place where you feel your hope of being a mother dwindling. We can spend years in this tunnel and it's a dreadful place. The tunnel can have destructive effect on our health, morale, personality, career, ambition and peace of mind because it is beginning part of our grief.

The end of our fertility, the end of our dreams to have a child of our own is a definite loss. What we and those around us fail to realize is that "not only will we never have children, but we will never create our own family. We will never watch them grow up, never throw children's birthday parties, never take that "first day at school photo", never teach them to ride a bike. We'll never see them graduate, never see them possibly get married and have their own children. We'll never get the chance to heal the wounds of our own childhood by doing things differently with *our* children. We'll never be grandmothers and never give the gift of grandchildren to our parents...We'll never be part of the community of mothers, never be considered a 'real woman'. And when we die, there is no one to leave our stuff to, and no one to take our lifetime's learnings to the next generation. " (Day, 2013, p. 81)

(As a group) Reflect on this description of grief. How do you feel about Day's description? What do you like about it? What don't you like about it?

Because our grief is not considered "real" we may find little support available to us. Sometimes we just want to talk and share in a safe place, to vent, to be angry, to cry. There are numerous online communities for childless women that can be helpful. If, however, you feel that you or someone you know needs to speak to someone professionally, your packet has a list of places you can go.

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Letting Go – 60 minutes

1. (Solo) On sheets of newsprint, write a letter to the child/children you never had. Tell them everything you would have wanted to tell them, had they been born. Feel free to use names that you would have given them. Be as expressive as you wish. After you have written your letter, fold it into as small a piece of paper as you can.
2. (Solo but feel free to chat during the activity) Take a flower pot and paint it or decorate it any way you wish. Put your letter at the bottom of the pot. Plant a bulb in the pot. When you have finished, take the pot home with you. Place it in a sunny spot, water it and let it grow.

Letting go of our emotions and our feelings about the children we wanted that would never be, will help us make room for new emotions and new feelings. Just like a bulb takes months to take root and grow, our grief may also take months to develop into healing and acceptance.

3. (As a group) How else is letting go of our grief like planting a seed or bulb? How did this activity feel for you? What did you notice in your body as you were moving through this work and letting go?

In the week ahead: Re-examine your feelings about your childlessness. Reflect on the Grief exercise. Spend the week journaling, you can write, draw, paste pictures anything that help you reflect on today, your feelings about being childless and your grief.

Closing liturgy (20 minutes)

A Liturgy of Loss*

Welcome and Gathering

We meet in the name of Jesus Christ who died and was raised to the glory of God the Father
His grace and mercy be with you

And also with you

We come, Lord in sorrow. We cry to you from the depths.

We wait for you, Lord, and in your word is our hope.

They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength

A moment of quiet

Prayers of Grief

Jesus said "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest."

Give us the faith to believe

That this is the pathway through life

You, who spent time in the wilderness,

Remember with us your struggling.

You, who were tossed in the centre of storms,

Remember with us the fear of that moment.

You whose friends slept through the agony of your heart,

Remember with us the loneliness.

God of grace, in you is life

We thank you that you are with us in the storms

As well as by the still waters

That you are life and in our lives

We come before you today to bring our grief

For the times of pain and tears;

Times of not being understood by family and friends,

Times of longing and struggling,

Ties of searching and emptiness,

Times of giving up hope.

We come before you today to bring our grief

For the feelings of loss.

For the child we could never bring to birth

For all that we can never share with them.

God of compassion,

You make nothing in vain

And love all that you have created,

We commit to you *our* baby and our faded hope of having a child

Learning to Dance

For whom *we* wanted to pour out such great love
For whom *we* cherished many hopes and dreams.
Grant *us* the assurance that *our* child,
Though not seen by us, is seen and known by you
And will share the risen life of your Son Jesus Christ.
Amen.

We light a candle to remember the children we dreamed about;
Whose lives is now held in love, in God's most tender care.
We light a candle to express the longing of our hearts;
The longing for the gift of a child.
God who sees into the depths of our hearts
And knows our words before we speak them
We lay the burden of our grief at the foot of the cross.
Remembering the dream that was not to be
We lay down the sadness and the emptiness
We release then into your transforming power
Trusting that you know us and love us.
We ask you to walk with us
Grant us healing and strength.
(silence)

O God, giver of all comfort,
Look down on *me* who has known the joy of hoping for a new life within
And the desolation of losing that life;
Do not hide your face from *my* distress,
But hear *me* when *I* call to you;
Restore *me* to health in body and spirit
And renew in *me* hope, faith and love,
For we ask it in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Prayer and Psalm of Thanksgiving and Healing

God of grace, in you is life.
We thank you that you are with us in the storms
As well as by the still waters
That you are life and in our lives
We come before you today to give our thanks
That in our pain you did not leave us
That in your mercy you tended to our wounds

Prayer for Anointing

Holy Spirit come and be with us
Guide and inspire us
Let us know your power
Power to heal
Power to comfort
Power to console
Holy Spirit come and be with us
**O give thanks to the Lord for he is good
His steadfast love endures forever
Out of my distress I called on the Lord
The Lord answered me and set me free
It is better to take refuge in the Lord
Than to put confidence in princes
I was pushed hard so that I was falling
But the Lord helped me
The Lord is my strength and my song
He has become my salvation
O give thanks to the Lord for he is good
His steadfast love endures forever.**

From [Psalm 118](#)

We light a candle as a sign of hope that God is always with us, that he loves us and knows our hearts and our deepest desires.

See the light for your journey.

And believe that the Spirit always moves ahead of you.

Feel the warmth of the flame,

It is the warmth of the love of God for you

That love will surround you wherever you go.

Take into yourself the power of the Holy Spirit

That you may be given courage for the next step of the journey.

(silence)

Dismissal

Jesus said "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

So now, go in peace

May you know the grace of God.

May your saviour, who has your treasure,

Walk with you today and every day.

Amen.

(Lowrie, 2017) *Liturgy Courtesy of Lizzie Lowrie: A Liturgy of Loss.

<http://saltwaterandhoney.org/blog/a-liturgy-of-loss>

Day 2

Welcome

Check-in 10 minutes

How was your week? Were you able to take the time and reflect on what we discussed last week?

We spoke about the **Pain of Never** and how we felt about that, we evaluated how we felt society and media portrayed childless people, we looked at how we felt we were viewed by others (family friends and coworkers) and then we considered how we felt about our own childlessness.

We shared out stories using the River of Life exercise.

Finally, we examined our grief process and tried to let go.



Looking ahead.

Today we will:

Review Activity

1. (In Pairs) Discuss. How did you feel during the week following the last time we met? Were you able to let go of your grief and begin to heal? How did you do that?
2. (As a group) Did anything hinder your ability to let go? What was it?

- Adjust our views of ourselves in light of God's Word
- Examine and practice strategies for coping with our childlessness and the stress that can come from that.
- Consider and formulate a plan to live our childless lives with purpose and meaning.

Learning to Dance

Learning to Dance to a different tune

After hearing and reflecting on our stories last time and thinking about our grief, we can feel harsh and negative toward ourselves. Not only do we feel less in society and in our direct environment (family, friends, work, church). We treat ourselves badly about our childlessness as well.

In this next section we will look at how we can change the way we view ourselves and change tune to which we dance.



Your present tune – 7 minutes



(Solo) Take a moment and reflect on last week. In contrast with examining how you felt about your childlessness then, think of all the things you feel about yourself because you are unable to have a child. Think of the way you think colleagues, family, your spouse, friends, media and society view you.

Write your thoughts down. (1-2 minutes)

(As a group) **Share the negative words and feelings we tend to feel about ourselves. (2-3 minutes) Facilitator will write the words on poster paper.**

Why are such feelings harmful: Physically? Emotionally? Spiritually?

When we feel overwhelmed by our negative feelings, we need to stop and adjust our view and see ourselves as God sees us. When He looks at us He doesn't see what we've accomplished, our bank accounts, where we live, how many children we've been able to produce. He looks at us and sees the beloved children He has created. The ones He has intended to live in the world.

Bible Passages

(All Passages are taken from the English Standard Version)

Isaiah 43

“Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.
For I am the LORD your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.”

Matthew 6:25-34

“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?^[a] And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

“Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

2 Corinthians 12

On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses— though if I should wish to boast, I would not be a fool, for I would be speaking the truth; but I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me. So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Psalm 113

Praise the LORD!
Praise, O servants of the LORD,
praise the name of the LORD!
Blessed be the name of the LORD
from this time forth and forevermore!
From the rising of the sun to its setting,
the name of the LORD is to be praised!
The LORD is high above all nations,
and his glory above the heavens!
Who is like the LORD our God,
who is seated on high,
who looks far down
on the heavens and the earth?
He raises the poor from the dust
and lifts the needy from the ash heap,
to make them sit with princes,
with the princes of his people.
He gives the barren woman a home,
making her the joyous mother of children.
Praise the LORD!

Learning to Dance

Coping

“You will lose someone
you can’t live
without, and your heart
will be badly broken, and
the bad news is that you
never completely get over
the loss of your beloved.
But this is also the good
news. They live forever
in your broken heart that
doesn’t seal back up. And
you come through. It’s
like having a broken leg
that never heals
perfectly—that still hurts
when the weather gets
cold, but you learn to
dance with the limp.”

— Anne Lamott

- Healing Hugs

(In Pairs) Take a few moments to read and reflect on this quotation. Write or draw anything that comes to mind after reading it. (5 minutes)



In the Quote that you read above, Anne Lamott writes about cold weather causing a ‘healed’ broken leg to hurt. What she is referring to in our context of childlessness are the stressors that arise which remind us of our situation. They are events, conversations, images, basically anything that involves our senses which causes us stress.

Did you know?

Stress may be defined as:

- **as a stimulus** - stress may be seen as characteristics of the environment (time stresses, job stresses, for example)
- **as a response** - stress is seen as a person’s response to these characteristics (a stress reaction)
- **as a “lack of fit” between people and their environment** (the transactional view of stress) - people experience stress when the perceived demands of their environment are greater than their perceived ability to cope.

Effects of Stress on You



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Don't forget

(As a group) We carry our childlessness with us wherever we go, like an invisible badge. Some days we forget we are wearing it, other days we remind ourselves and still other days our environment pierces us with the harsh reality. Stressors are situations or events in our environment which cause us anxiety or stress. Why is it important to learn to handle the stressors in our lives? **(5 minutes)**



Coping with our stressors

To begin to cope with the stressors caused by identifying the types of stressors we have encountered. They can be divided into two:



(As a group) - Why do Stressors cause us anxiety and other reactions? (1-2 minutes)

Did you know?

Stressor or Trigger? There are stressors we can control, and there are stressors that we can't. Triggers are when either of your 5 senses cause you to think of or sense a stressor.

External Stressors

- Major life changes
- Environment
- Unpredictable events
- Workplace
- Social

Internal Stressors

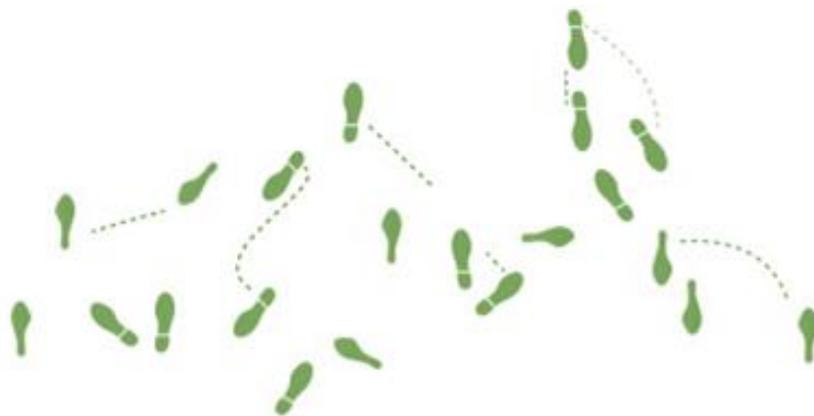
- Fears
- Uncertainty and lack of control
- Beliefs

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How can we manage stressors?

(As a group) Review the handout **Blake Flannery's master list of coping strategies** (Flannery, 2016). This is just one of many lists that exist offering suggestions for coping strategies. (5 minutes)

(In pairs) Are there any other coping strategies not on the list? Add them to the list. (1-2 minutes)



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Blake Flannery's (2016) master list of coping methods and skills

Diversions:

- Write, draw, paint, photography
- Play an instrument, sing, dance, act
- Take a shower or a bath
- Garden
- Take a walk, or go for a drive
- Watch television or a movie
- Watch cute kitten/puppy videos on YouTube
- Play a game
- Go shopping
- Clean or organize your environment
- Read
- Take a break or vacation

Social/Interpersonal Coping:

- Talk to someone you trust
- Set boundaries and say "no"
- Write a note to someone you care about
- Be assertive
- Use humor
- Spend time with friends and/or family
- Serve someone in need
- Care for or play with a pet
- Role-play challenging situations with others
- Encourage others
- Avoid social media

Other Strategies:



Cognitive Coping:

- Make a gratitude list
- Brainstorm solutions
- Lower your expectations of the situation
- Keep an inspirational quote with you
- Be flexible
- Write a list of goals
- Take a class
- Act opposite of negative feelings
- Write a list of pros and cons for decisions
- Reward or pamper yourself when successful
- Write a list of strengths
- Accept a challenge with a positive attitude

Tension Releasers:

- Exercise or play sports
- Catharsis (yelling in the bathroom, punching a punching bag)
- Cry
- Laugh

Physical:

- Get enough sleep
- Eat healthy foods
- Get into a good routine
- Eat a little chocolate
- Limit caffeine
- Deep/slow breathing

Spiritual:

- Pray or meditate
- Enjoy nature
- Get involved in a worthy cause

Limit Setting:

- Drop some involvement
- Prioritize important tasks
- Use assertive communication
- Schedule time for yourself

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Identifying your Stressors – 15 minutes

1. (In groups of 2 or 3) Using the handout provided (**Stressful Situations and Coping**), identify the situations that you encounter which are stressful because of your childlessness. Write the answers on the left column of a sheet of paper. Separate these into what you can control and what you can't control.
2. Identifying the effects of the stressors on us - On the right side of the list we just made, make a list of the effects of these stressors. They don't have to correspond directly to the list of stressors.
3. Knowing how to cope - Using **Blake Flannery's master list of coping strategies** (Flannery, 2016), in your groups, identify which coping strategies would work when applied to your list of stressors and effects.

Role play Exercise – 45 minutes

Situational role play

Role play activities are very beneficial. They allow us to practice situations and our reactions to them. When learning a technique of coping, role playing allows us to “try it out” in a safe environment. Caution however must be exercised so that we “get into character” as authentically as possible without hurting our group mates. Please be kind and recognize that the situations may arouse emotions for some. Let us try to help each other cope with any potential stresses together.

1. (In pairs or threes) Choose a stressful situation from Activity 3. Try to use some of the coping strategies from the master list and act out how you would apply them to your situation. The situation should not last more than 5 minutes. After 15 minutes of preparation, you should be ready to present to the other groups.
2. (As a group) What were some of your feelings as you were doing the role play? For those watching and listening, what emotions arose? What reactions would have caused more stress for you? What other coping strategies could have been used?

Moving Forward -Changing our Choreography

We have learned many new things together:

- We have learned that we are not alone.
- We have learned to grieve and to heal.
- We have learned to see ourselves as God sees us.
- We have learned the importance of coping with our stressors.
- We've also been equipped with a few strategies to help us cope.

Now we have to think of what will happen when we leave this place and go back to our lives. How can we move forward with what we have taught ourselves today? In this next section we will move toward formulating a Plan B for ourselves. Our initial plan to have children did not materialize. So, what's next?

How to Find your Plan B

- Identify what's missing
 - Create a vision
- Clarify your values and priorities
- Recognize what you can change and what you can't
 - Get organized
- Foster your support network



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Identify What's Missing - Finding harmony in your life

(In Pairs) 7 minutes

1. What do you think of, when you hear the word Harmony? What images or words come to mind?

2. What does harmony feel like, sound like, look like, taste like?



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3. Why is creating and maintaining harmony in our lives important?

4. What are the obstacles to your harmony? What is missing from your life (besides children)?



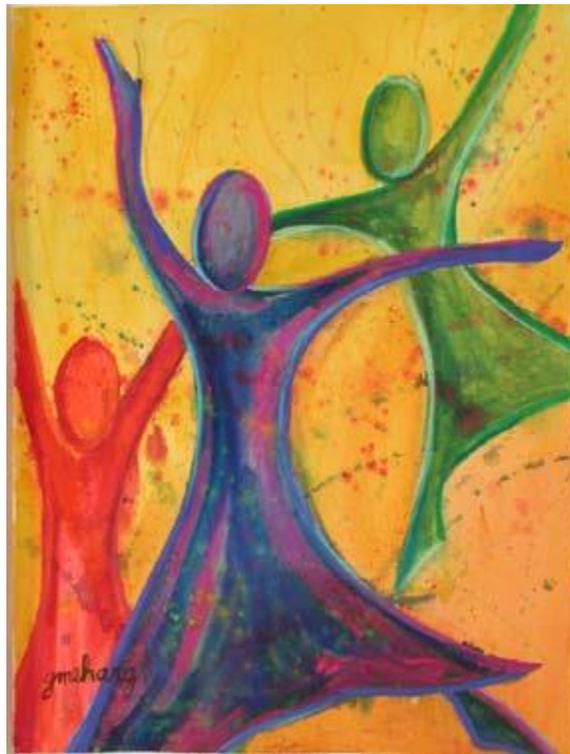
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Benefits of Harmony – 15 minutes

It's easy to focus on the things we miss or the things we feel we are missing out on because we don't have children. It can be very helpful however to stop and think of the things we CAN do BECAUSE WE DON'T HAVE CHILDREN.

(Solo) Using the handout “**Benefits of Harmony**”, write all the benefits of not having children in the categories: personal, family, work and community. Don't worry if you can't think of anything to write in each of the categories, just do your best.

(In Pairs) Discuss your benefits with a partner.



Gwen Meharg, Abandoned Worship

<http://www.drawneartogod.com/ArtDetail.asp?ID=20010905&art=abandoned-worship#.WsASmojwbIV>

Benefits of harmony

What things can you do because you are childless in each of these aspects of your life to create harmony?

Personal

Family

Work

Community

Finding your Plan B

Many of us have put our lives on hold. We've delayed learning new things and seeking fulfillment. Our priority has been to try to have children. We've invested our dreams, energy and finances into trying to achieve that. Now here we are. No children and changed relationships. While all of our friends and family are busy raising their kids, we are left wondering: "What's now God? What's your plan for **me**?"

Not having a Plan B is a stressor. It is important for our health to try to find it.

Creating your Vision – 10 minutes

(Solo) Using the "My Action Plan" handout, take a few minutes to write down all the things that you have ever wanted to do but put off doing either: "until you had kids" or "because you wanted kids first".

Examine your list and choose any of the things that you would still like to do. Highlight or underline those things using a different colour. **This is your vision.**

Examining your Values – 10 minutes

What are your values?

(As a group) Examine the list of values provided in the handout (Examples of Values). Are there any that you would add? Write them down on the handout.

(Solo) Which values are most important to you? What are your top 10? Rank them in order of importance.

Compare your vision to your values? Take a few minutes and modify your vision based on your values if needed. What can you change? What can't you change?

Get organized – 10 minutes

(Solo) What steps do you need to take to realize your vision? Identify the first steps. Write them on your handout

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My Action Plan

Things I have always wanted to do but delayed doing	My Values	Things I would still like to do in light of my values	The first step	The next steps

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Examples of Values

Security	Entertainment
Freedom	Survival
Adventure	Excitement
Fun	Escape
Health	Creativity
Love/Connection	Confidence
Honesty	Solitude
Passion	Courage
Intimacy	Gratitude
Commitment	Satisfaction
Loyalty	Closeness
Positive Thinking	Peace
Friendship	Humour
Success	Contentment
Respect	Comfort
Happiness	Learning/Growing
Self-Worth	Being the best
	Contributing
	Helping

**Write other values that
you would like to include**

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Identify your support network

(As a group) Why is a support network important to achieve your Plan B?

Draw your Support Network – 15 minutes *

(Solo) This exercise is designed to help you identify your personal support network. You will need a large piece of paper to complete this exercise. You will also need some different coloured pens. Feel free to be as creative as you like.

First, draw a picture or symbol of yourself in the centre of the paper. Then, draw pictures or symbols of all the parts of your vision (your PlanB) around the outside of the page. On your page, draw everything or everyone that can support you in your vision. Connect your support network to the things you would like to do and indicate how strong that support is. Use one colour. Are they strong or weak? Is it regular or occasional? Indicate also, where support is lacking with another colour, what kind of support you need to achieve your vision. What can block your receipt of support? Use another colour.

Sharing network with partner – 10 minutes

(In Pairs) When you have finished, share your map with a partner. Explain your work and then ask your partner to give you an overall impression of your map.

From: (Module 11: young people and drugs - issues for workers: learner's workbook, 2004)

Prayer – 10-15 minutes

Spend the next few minutes praying over your plans.

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Final Words

Thank you for joining us in the Learning to Dance workshop. Thank you for your active participation and valuable contributions.

We hope that you feel better than you did when you arrived one week ago. We hope that you have been able to feel some release and healing and we hope that you have some tools to help you move forward with peace. I pray that you will feel empowered to move ahead and tackle your Plan B with confidence. And I hope that you will embrace the challenge of becoming the people God intended you to be.

Moving forward I'd like you to consider the following questions

How are you going to obtain the support you need to be able to dance the new dance?

What steps can we take to remain connected as a group if desired? Social media, email?

Is there a need to meet regularly? i.e. monthly?

Closing Prayer

Let us close by lifting our voices to God praising Him for the wonderful gifts He has given us and asking Him for guidance and strength. Feel free to pray out loud if you are so led. For those not comfortable with praying out loud, we will end with a few minutes of silence and the facilitator will close the prayer.



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Additional Resources

Web Sites

Not So Mommy <http://notsomommy.com/>

Saltwater and Honey <http://saltwaterandhoney.com/>

The Dovecote <http://www.thedovecote.org/>

Gateway Women <https://gateway-women.com/>

The infertility network <https://www.infertilitynetwork.org/>

Magazines

Childless Not by Choice Magazine <https://thecnbcmagazine.net/>

Counselling

Peel Psychology & Therapy Centre

1A Conestoga Drive

Suite 100

Brampton, Ontario L6Z 4N5

(844) 331-0428