

Nanette Riendeau Coaching

Six Steps to Coping with Grief as a Woman Without Children

A guide to managing the ongoing feelings of longing, sadness, and alienation that are a part of the unique type of loss experienced by a woman who wanted to become a mother but didn't.



You may feel that motherhood was meant to be your path and that path would have brought you so much joy, fulfillment, and purpose. And it may have, had it been your path. But, you are now facing the reality that it isn't.

That sadness you feel is grief. It's often a grief that goes unnamed and unacknowledged because it comes from a loss that is not always obvious to the outside eye. However, for those of us who dreamed of, hoped for, and expected motherhood, facing the reality of life without it is a very real loss.

I, too, am a woman without children who never expected this to be my life. I, too, have experienced this loss and grief. I want you to know that my life is beautiful and full and I see that for you too. You can move through this grieving process and find joy again. Your life may not look as expected but I offer you this guide to support you on your first steps towards discovering all the meaning and happiness it can offer.

I've come up with an acronym to help our minds think about moving through ambiguous grief as a process of components. This helps us to more easily "check in on" ourselves along the way and makes it easier to connect to a sense of agency in the face of circumstances beyond our control.

The acronym is SEARCH.

01: S is for Self-compassion

Self-compassion is a practice and I encourage you to think of it as one. We must practice treating ourselves with the same kindness and understanding that we would offer to a beloved friend in distress. When we practice self-compassion, we give ourselves permission to feel our feelings without self-judgment.

We acknowledge that grief is a natural and often messy process, and that it's okay to feel the pain and confusion that accompanies it. This self-kindness helps us to gradually heal, providing the emotional space needed to process our loss and ultimately find a path towards acceptance and resilience. It may feel self-indulgent, but research has shown the opposite to be true.

Higher levels of self-compassion lead to more resiliency, change, and growth. Just imagine what would happen if you were to scold a child just learning to walk every time she fell down. We must practice offering ourselves the same encouragement we would naturally give to that child.

02: E is for Education

Society tells us certain things about what we should do or be, and it's natural to start to believe those ideas without realizing they weren't ours to begin with. Becoming more aware of these messages can help us process our grief more effectively.

The idea that being a mom is the most important thing for a woman is called "pronatalism" – it's like society cheering for everyone to have babies. When women, for their many reasons, don't end up becoming mothers, people may have judgements about them as a byproduct of this belief system. It's essential to know that a woman's worth and her ability to benefit the world is not equivalent to her status as a mother. When we understand this, we can stop blaming ourselves and see that society's ideas impact how we feel about ourselves and others.

Knowing this can make us feel less alone and help us understand our grief better. It's not just us going through this; it's something that affects many people. When we all learn about these ideas, we can work together to make things better.

Knowledge is power! When we learn, we become stronger and better equipped to represent alternatives to unhelpful and unfair ideas.

03: A is for Acceptance

Acceptance is not the same as resignation, approval, or giving up. It is acknowledging the truth of the reality we find ourselves in. Paradoxically, in doing so, we find ourselves better equipped to move forward, heal, and change. It takes up a lot of inner resources to maintain an inner battle against what is true in our reality. We must practice fully embracing reality as it is, even when it's painful or undesirable.

This is an ongoing process of releasing resistance and judgment that we must return to again and again. We then gain greater access to our psychological and emotional resources and can see our current reality not as an end point but as a starting point for deciding whether and how to make changes.

04: R is for Rewriting our Narratives

The importance of rewriting our personal narrative lies in reclaiming agency over our own life story and identity. It allows for a more authentic, self-affirming, and emotionally healing perspective. It helps us move from a place of grief and loss towards a more balanced and empowered sense of self, where motherhood is just one aspect among many that may define our identity and purpose.

This process involves reflecting on our personal values and identity beyond motherhood, and exploring other aspects of life that bring fulfillment, purpose, and joy. We may find these in our relationships, career, hobbies, or community involvement. Rewriting our narrative also means viewing our life journey through a more compassionate and self-affirming lens and acknowledging the strength, resilience, and wisdom gained through the experience of not becoming a mother.

05: C is for Community and Connection

Finding community in the process of healing from the grief of not becoming a mother provides opportunities for sharing, learning, and resilience-building, while also playing a role in challenging and reshaping societal narratives around motherhood and womanhood.

Being part of a community of individuals who have had similar experiences creates a safe space for validation and understanding. Others in the community can empathize with the unique challenges, emotions, and societal pressures associated with not becoming a mother, which can be difficult for those who haven't experienced it firsthand to fully comprehend. Grief can be an isolating experience, and it's common for women facing this type of grief to feel alone or misunderstood. A supportive community helps combat this isolation by providing a sense of belonging and connection.

Community members often share coping strategies, insights, and resources that have been helpful in their own healing journeys. Being part of a community can also empower individuals to advocate for their needs and rights and foster a collective voice to challenge societal norms and expectations that may contribute to feelings of grief and inadequacy.

06: H is for Helping Others

Acts of service and helping others can be a powerful source of support and healing for individuals grieving the loss of motherhood. These actions not only provide relief from grief but also offer opportunities for personal growth, connection, and a renewed sense of purpose.

Acts of service redirect the focus away from one's own grief and towards the needs of others. This shift can provide temporary relief from the pain and sadness associated with personal loss.

Helping others often generates feelings of fulfillment and satisfaction, counterbalancing the emotions tied to grief and creating a sense of purpose. Helping others reminds you of your inherent worth and value as an individual, independent of motherhood. It also provides a broader perspective on life's challenges and joys, and your part in the larger tapestry of human experiences. Acts of service empower you to take control of your actions and make a positive impact on the world.

Nanette Riendeau, LMFT

I am a licensed therapist and mental health coach. I have an MA in Women's Spirituality and an MA in Counseling Psychology with a specialization in Drama Therapy. I help women without children identify and process their ambiguous losses, dismantle harmful societal narratives, find resilience, rewrite their personal narratives, and find new meaning in their lives so they can embrace their unique journey with confidence, satisfaction, and a sense of peace and purpose in the world.

I always thought I would be a mother (and I would've been a damn good one) but I never would have been able to imagine the ways I've found fulfillment and purpose in my unexpected life path. I believe we are a powerful force; our maternal energy is a valuable resource in this world!

I would love to hear more about your story and where you are on your journey.

Book a call with me now to discuss how I can support you along the way!

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