



Processing Infertility Grief

A loss of something we had hoped for

Walking the path of infertility is an experience of life not following the path we have hoped and planned for. This deviation from our hopes is painful, but at times hard to articulate and process. It is a loss, not of something we have held, but of something we have hoped for. As Laura Bush once wrote,

“The English language lacks the words to mourn an absence. For the loss of a parent, grandparent, spouse, child or friend, we have all manner of words and phrases, some helpful some not. Still we are conditioned to say something, even if it is only ‘I’m sorry for your loss.’ But for an absence, for someone who was never there at all, we are wordless to capture that particular emptiness. For those who deeply want children and are denied them, those missing babies hover like silent ephemeral shadows over their lives. Who can describe the feel of a tiny hand that is never held?”

(Laura Bush, *Spoken from the Heart*)

Responses to loss

This experience of loss is valid, and still may be grieved. The Kübler-Ross model of grief describes five primary responses to loss: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. These may be experienced in any order or combination. Recognizing and naming what we are experiencing can in turn help us process the emotions as well as find ways to cope and heal.

Five ways you can process and cope with your grief are as follows.

★ 1. Acknowledge your feelings

All too often in the experience of infertility, your feelings can be minimized or even dismissed by others. Sometimes you might even do this to yourself. However, the first step towards processing your emotions is acknowledging that they exist and that they are valid. Take some time to identify what you are feeling and give yourself permission to feel it, without minimizing or dismissing it.

★ **2. Anticipate when these feelings may arise**

There may be certain circumstances in which you notice a particular feeling emerge, such as depression after a negative pregnancy test, or anger when a friend unexpectedly announces a pregnancy. Recognizing when the feelings arise can help you plan for how to cope with them.

★ **3. Plan for self-care**

Once you can anticipate when you may experience certain emotions, you can plan how to care for yourself in that experience. For example, taking a walk to burn off some anger, setting aside some time to cry, journaling your thoughts down, or even just comforting yourself with your favorite latte.

★ **4. Reach out to your support system**

Think of who you can reach out to for support. What family members or friends can provide a listening ear and kind words? Who could go with you for a walk or to grab a cup of tea and talk? If you don't have many understanding people in your circle, you can reach out to our mentors for support.

★ **5. Arm yourself with spiritual tools.**

Last but certainly not least, think of what spiritual tools would help with the emotions you are experiencing. For example, reciting the sorrowful mysteries of the rosary can help you feel accompanied in your sadness, praying the litany of trust is helpful if you are wishing you could bargain your way out, or spending time in adoration may allow the peace of the Lord to wash over you.

The worksheet on the following page can help you work through your feelings and ways to cope.

We're here to help - more resources

- ★ **Self-care:** If you'd like to go more in depth on this area and make a self-care plan for different kinds of situations you're facing on this journey, take a look at our "Levels of Self-Care" resource at thefruitfulhollow.com/resources.
- ★ **Support:** The Sisters of Hannah are a team of women who have experienced a variety of infertility challenges and come to a place of peace. They are prepared to listen, pray for and support mentees. You can request to speak with mentors for free by filling in the "Speak to a mentor" form at thefruitfulhollow.com/sistersofhannah.
- ★ **Spiritual attack:** If you are facing spiritual attack and wish to arm yourself with tools to deal with this, check out our resource "Wielding the Sword of the Spirit: Fighting Satan's Lies with Scripture" at thefruitfulhollow.com/resources.

PROCESSING INFERTILITY GRIEF

Example

What am I grieving?	<i>Being able to have the first grandchildren in the family.</i>
How is my experience different to what I had hoped for?	<i>My sister just announced that she is pregnant and will be having the first child in the family.</i>

Stage: <i>Anger</i>	
How am I experiencing this stage of grief?	
<i>I'm so angry that even though I am older and have been married for years, my newlywed younger sister announced that she is pregnant. It's not fair!</i>	
How can I anticipate these feelings arising?	<i>These feelings come up when the family is gathered together and will probably come up at celebrations like the gender reveal and baby shower.</i>
How can I care for myself in this experience?	<i>I can remind myself that I still have special relationships with my parents and take some time to have one-on-one time with them. I can also go for a walk with my husband to decompress.</i>
Who can I rely on for support?	<i>My husband and best friend.</i>
What are some spiritual tools I can use?	<i>Going to adoration and bringing my feelings to the Lord. Going to confession if my anger also turns into unkindness or envy.</i>

PROCESSING INFERTILITY GRIEF

Your turn

What am I grieving?	
How is my experience different to what I had hoped for?	

Stage: <i>(circle as appropriate)</i> Denial Anger Bargaining Depression Acceptance	
How am I experiencing this stage of grief?	
How can I anticipate these feelings arising?	
How can I care for myself in this experience?	
Who can I rely on for support?	
What are some spiritual tools I can use?	