

World Childless Week

Sarah and John's Story

The experiences of one childless couple.

What helps and what hurts

Sarah:

"We've learned a lot through our journey about what helps and what hurts when it comes to being mindful of childless families. **One of the most important things is simply being aware that this is a sensitive and deeply personal topic for many people. Recognising that not everyone's life follows the same path is crucial.**

It's really helpful when people avoid making assumptions or asking intrusive questions like 'When are you going to have kids?' or 'Why don't you just adopt?' These questions can bring up a lot of pain and frustration. Our journey is complex, and often there are no easy answers or solutions."

John:

"**Another thing to steer clear of is using language that implies judgment or pity.** Statements like 'You don't know what real love is until you have children' or 'You're so lucky you don't have kids, you have so much freedom' can be really dismissive of our experiences and feelings. They minimise our pain and make us feel like our lives are less meaningful.

"**Ultimately, being mindful is about empathy, respect, and understanding.** It's about seeing us as whole individuals with our own unique challenges and joys and supporting us in ways that acknowledge our reality."

The pressures faced

John:

"As a man, I don't feel the same level of direct societal pressure to become a parent. That said, there's still an expectation to carry on the family name and legacy. It's a different kind of burden, but significant, nonetheless.

Dealing with issues related to infertility has been tough on my sense of masculinity. **There's an ingrained belief that part of being a man is the ability to father children. When you can't do that, feelings of inadequacy and failure can surface. It's hard not to let those feelings affect your self-esteem.**

While Sarah tends to be open about her feelings, **my grief often manifests as anger or withdrawal.** It's not that I don't want to talk about it, but societal norms have made me believe that men should be stoic, that showing vulnerability is a sign of weakness. Support groups have provided a space to share and process our emotions, to feel less alone in this struggle.

Society is slowly changing, becoming more accepting of diverse family structures, and recognizing that being child-free, by choice or not, is valid. Increased advocacy and awareness are helping to provide more resources and support. This gives us hope".

Family comes in many forms.

Sarah:

"We weren't really looking for a dog, but one day, we decided to visit the dogs home and the moment we met Jasper, it was like he chose us.

Jasper has helped fill a void. He's not a child, but he's family. He's helped me find joy in the present, rather than constantly mourning the future that never came. He's reminded us that while our journey didn't go as planned, there are still beautiful moments to be had. We're so grateful for him, and he's taught us that family comes in many forms."

It was hard to be around family members who had children.

Sarah:

"Navigating our journey of being childless not by choice was challenging. **At first, it was hard to be around family members who had children.** There was this constant reminder of what we didn't have. I often felt a mix of happiness for them and sadness for us, which was difficult to reconcile.

"Despite the difficulty, our families were a tremendous support. They didn't always understand our pain completely, but they tried. My sister, in particular, was very empathetic. **She would call just to check in, and she tried to include us in her children's lives in a way that felt comfortable for us.** At first, it was awkward to tell our family that certain events were too painful for us to attend, but over time, they understood and respected our boundaries. It made a big difference in reducing our stress and helping us cope."

John:

"Finding joy in our nieces and nephews has also been healing. It took time, but we learned to focus on the love we could give them rather than what we were missing. We built strong, meaningful relationships with them, and that brought a different kind of fulfilment.

And then there was Jasper, who played a huge role in our healing process. Our families embraced him as part of our family, which made us feel more complete. It helped bridge the gap between us and the rest of the family, giving us a shared source of joy and love."