

4 Insensitive Things to Say to Infertile Couples

Last Saturday, I participated in a local author fair at our local library. It was a good time to meet people, talk to other writers, and give away free previews of *Plus or Minus*.

The first woman awkwardly approached my table. She wore a shapeless brown coat and dragged a small child along.

I told her about my books. "This one is about coping with infertility."

She let out a little puff of a laugh and said, "Yeah, I wish I was infertile."

The very first person, the very first member of the public to react to my face told me she wished she was infertile.

I guffawed a little because my natural inclination is to try to deflect any awkwardness that happens in my presence. I should have told her that was a terrible thing to say. I should have told her that there are medical procedures that can help her. I wanted to say *anything* to confront the blatant thoughtlessness of that comment.

But I did not.

The awkward woman dragged her burdensome child along, and the rest of the day went along pleasantly. No one else was rude. We gave away lots and lots of previews.

But it reminded me that for most people, *infertility* is just not in their vocabulary. It's *so much* not in their vocabulary that the first thing that comes out of their mouths is often rude, thoughtless or even unintentionally cruel.

People have said a lot of unintentionally rude things to Cheri

and I over the years. Please, when you run into people who are unhappily childless, resist the urge to respond with these phrases.

‘I Wish I Was Infertile’

There are lots of ways to show sympathy to people.

Telling them you wish you had their affliction is not one of them. I don't go around telling women I wish I had breast cancer. I don't go to children's hospitals and cheer up the kids by telling them I wish I had leukemia. This response minimizes and denies the pain that people rightfully feel when they cannot have children. I am still baffled trying to imagine how this sound good in anyone's head before it flies out of their mouth.

‘You Want to Borrow My Kids?’

Short answer: No we do not.

Now, there is lots of room in the world for great aunts and uncles. I have taught children for several years without having my own children. But when you dismissively offer to give away your children (or tacitly encourage the abduction of your children), you minimize their value and worth. Yes, we know that kids are hard. We are paying thousands of dollars to try to have one anyway. Either you are pretending that children are not really worth it, or you are just a miserable person who should not have had kids to begin with.

‘You Can Just Adopt Though, Right?’

Adoption is rightfully getting a lot of positive press in the Christian community, but here is the thing: Infertility may nudge a couple toward adoption, but the two are really different conversations. Orphans deserve to be adopted by parents who really *want* them.

Couples should feel called and *compelled* to adopt, not just as

a consolation prize. Don't minimize the value of orphans by making them a second-place trophy. Besides that, *you* could just adopt too, you know?

'At Least You Have *One*'

Believe it or not, most infertility is actually secondary infertility, meaning it happens after a couple has already had one child. The problem with secondary infertility, or losing a pregnancy after having one or two kids is that it leaves the couple in "no man's land." They don't really get the sympathy of anyone.

Childless couples act like the couple who is trying to have two is being greedy, and other parents think they should get over their grief and enjoy the kids they already have.

I have even had people minimize their *own* pain in my presence when they learn about our journey. They *only* lost one pregnancy, or they have a couple of kids before they had trouble. And I always encourage them to own and acknowledge their pain and the value of what was lost. Pain is not a contest, and none of us feel it relative to anyone else's.

Your pain deserves equal acknowledgement as my own.

There are a lot more phrases that probably need to be stricken from our vocabulary. I haven't even touched "Just relax and it will happen," (because we all know that relaxation cures everything from infertility to cancer). But for now, avoiding these will make our interactions a lot less awkward ... at least until your kids start throwing a tantrum in the middle of the library.

What about you? Know of any good quips, questions or so-called "condolences" to avoid? Here's a story that might encourage infertile couples.

Matt Appling is a teacher, pastor and author of and the book

Life After Art: What You Forgot About Life and Faith Since You Left the Art Room, released by Moody Publishers. He lives in Kansas City, Missouri.

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