

Non-Mother's Day

How to help those women who can't have children on this day

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(QMI Agency files)

Hallmark may not yet have a card for it, but National Infertility Survival Day is the official day of celebration and self-care for those coping with infertility.

The holiday falls the Sunday before Mother's Day, and is an opportunity for women who wish (or wished) to conceive to take a day for themselves. It's also a chance for friends and family to help lift the spirits of these loved ones.

Don't think you know anybody who struggles with infertility? Well, you probably do, but just don't know it. According to the Infertility Awareness Association of Canada, it's estimated that about one in six couples have a fertility issue. What's more, average sperm counts are decreasing, while the infertility trend is increasing.

For people who fall into these statistics, it doesn't always mean having children is impossible, but it can be expensive - mentally, physically, emotionally - and financially.

So, while Mother's Day may be a time for family and celebration to those with children, it can be a time of isolation and depression to those who have difficulty having children, or can't have them at all.

Despite its prevalence, there is still a stigma associated with infertility, but as information spreads and more events start to pop up this time of year, that is changing. Beverly Barna is one of the pioneers of that change.

She founded National Infertility Survival Day in 2004, and is the author of the funny and brutally honest book, *Infertility Sucks!*

The second Sunday in May can be trying for many women, as Barna notes, "I think that a lot of the emotions and challenges we endure have some basic antecedents that transcend specific situations: the isolated feelings, the sense that one is being left out, the frustration, the feeling of being punished, the realization that we grew up taking for granted that we would be mothers."

She recommends that women take the Sunday before Mother's Day, and even the day itself, to be celebrated - and spoiled.

"Celebrate who you are and what you do have. Eat chocolate - in bed! Have brunch. And don't scrimp on the Bloody Marys - you're only drinking for one."

Helaina Cappel tried to conceive over the course of two years and four miscarriages, and used another approach to deal with Mother's Day.

Though she avoided pregnant friends or those with children, Cappel says, "Mother's Day has always been one of my favourite days. Not only because I get to celebrate my mother and everything she has done in her life and sacrificed so that I could have a good life, but also because I could celebrate all of the wonderful women in my life who have helped to shape me into the woman I am today."

This year, she will celebrate the holiday with her husband and her almost two-year-old son, Aubrey.

So even though Mother's Day can be the hardest time of the year for many women, it can also be a pit stop to gather strength and peace of mind.

Of course, every woman with fertility issues will find a different way to cope with the holiday. The important thing is to acknowledge this, because the more it is hidden the deeper the pain and (unnecessary) shame will become.

Just remember, having a child is not an accomplishment - it is a gift. Coping with infertility is an accomplishment, and that strength deserves to be celebrated.

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