How do I tell my girlfriend I'm sterile? [1]

Dear Alice,

I am an 18-year-old male. And I lost my ability to reproduce in a bull riding accident at a rodeo I competed in about two years ago. I would like to father children more than anything. And now I have a girlfriend who is talking of wanting to have kids in the future. But I can't bring myself to tell her that I can't because I still haven't dealt with the problem of coping with it myself. I need to know how to deal with the fact I cannot have kids, especially now that my significant other wants them, but is ignorant to the fact that I am sterile. Please help me ASAP! This is tearing me apart.

Answer

Dear Reader,

Your heartache over this issue is justified and completely understandable. Having biological children is a really important part of life for some people. Being with someone who talks about having kids in the future can be heartbreaking, especially if you feel you haven't yet dealt with your inability to do so. The thing is, you can still have children, perhaps just not in the way you had originally envisioned. Now, let's discuss some approaches to talking with your girlfriend.

Exploring your feelings might be a good first step, something you can do before you have the conversation. Consider taking some time to think about how not being able to reproduce changes things, how it impacts your life expectations. Learning about alternatives to having children might also be useful. Are you open to adoption? Would you consider acting as a mentor for other children in your life? Thinking about these questions and others may help you in your conversation with your girlfriend. You might try contacting RESOLVE, The National Infertility Association [2], which provides education, advocacy, and support for individuals coping with situations similar to your own. RESOLVE also explores family building alternatives such as adoption, donor options, surrogacy, and much more for future planning.

Additionally, you might find talking with a counselor to be highly beneficial in the process of coming to terms with your feelings about the situation. An outside perspective from an unbiased mental health professional might be instrumental in your ability to process and accept not being able to reproduce. Further, an experienced counselor can help you plan your approach to talking to your girlfriend.

Once you feel a bit more comfortable with the reality of being sterile, having a conversation with your girlfriend might not seem as overwhelming. A straightforward approach might be
helpful: Consider telling her that you feel you are at a point in your relationship where you need to share something important with her. Describe your accident and its ramifications, and then tell her that you will have to explore other, non-traditional ways of having children when that time comes. If you think it may be helpful, you can also suggest that the two of you discuss the situation together with a counselor.

Hopefully with some time, patience, and understanding, both you and your girlfriend will accept (and even embrace) the cards you've been dealt. While it may seem cliché, it's true that in life, when one door closes, usually another one opens.

Alice!

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Resources

Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) (Morningside) [15]
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