

## How do I tell my girlfriend I'm sterile? <sup>[1]</sup>

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 big part of how some folks see their future. As such, being with someone who talks about having kids can be heartbreaking, especially if you feel you haven't yet dealt with your inability to do so on your own. The thing is, you can still have children, perhaps just not in the way you had originally envisioned. Now, on to ways to process your own feelings about infertility and some approaches to talking with your girlfriend.

Exploring your feelings is likely a good first step and is something you can do before you have a bigger conversation with your partner. Take some time to think about how not being able to reproduce changes your circumstances and in what ways 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 discussion with your girlfriend. You might try contacting [RESOLVE, The National Infertility Association](#) <sup>[2]</sup>, which provides education, advocacy, and support for individuals coping with situations similar to your own. This non-profit organization also explores family-building alternatives such as adoption, donor options, surrogacy, and much more for future planning.

Additionally, you might find talking with a mental health professional to be highly beneficial as you come to terms with your feelings about the situation. An outside perspective from an unbiased professional might be instrumental in your ability to process and accept not being able to

reproduce. They can also help you think through how to discuss this with your girlfriend and plan your approach.

Once you feel a bit more comfortable with the reality of your infertility, having a conversation with your girlfriend might not seem as overwhelming. A straightforward approach will likely be a good approach. Find a time and place that you can set aside for a private discussion. Consider telling her that you feel you're at a point in your relationship where you need to share something 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 if and when that time comes. Make sure to give her time to share her feelings and make an effort to hear her thoughts — she might surprise you with how supportive she can be. Alternatively, it might take her some time to really consider this reality, in which case, it's key to let her have time to process this news, too. If you think it may be helpful, you can also suggest that the two of you discuss the situation together with a counselor or a health care provider.

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

Alice!

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