

INVOLUNTARY CHILDLESSNESS AT MATERNITY AND CHILD HEALTH CLINICS



Approximately every fifth couple at a fertile age in Finland is faced with involuntary childlessness. Most of these couples will eventually welcome a much-wanted child and become customers of maternity and child health clinics. Approximately 6% of babies born each year have been conceived through fertility treatments.

The effects of involuntary childlessness are primarily psychological and social.

Depression, anxiety and stress are common with persons affected by involuntary childlessness. Many have been through long fertility treatments, which are often both physically and mentally strenuous. Childlessness affects many kinds of families, such as LGBT+ families, single mothers or immigrant families. Many adoptive and multiple-birth families have dealt with childlessness.

PARTICULAR ISSUES

- The causes of childlessness may also affect the prenatal well-being of mother and baby.
- Many of those affected by childlessness have suffered one or more miscarriages.
- Fears during pregnancy and fear of losing the child are common for those affected by involuntary childlessness. It is important to address these fears throughout pregnancy.
- Prolonged childlessness before successful pregnancy puts the mother at higher risk for intense fear of birth and for experiencing post-partum depression.
- Childlessness can be challenging for a relationship. It is important to strengthen communication and facilitate processing childlessness together with one's partner. Childlessness also impacts sexuality.
- Many parents affected by childlessness feel as though they have no right to feel tired or dissatisfied once they finally have a child. This leads many to not seek much-needed help.
- Donor-conceived children and their parents may need particular support in dealing with as well as talking about the child's origins.

BRING UP CHILDLESSNESS AND ASK QUESTIONS. IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOT UNDERMINE THE PARENTS' PERSONAL EXPERIENCE, AND TO SUPPORT PROCESSING IT ON THEIR OWN TERMS.

YOU MAY ASK E.G., "DID YOU HAVE TROUBLE CONCEIVING? HOW DOES THIS AFFECT YOU NOW?"

DISPLAY MATERIAL ADDRESSING CHILDLESSNESS.

IF NEEDED, REFER PARENTS TO MEET WITH A COUPLES THERAPIST OR PSYCHOTHERAPIST SPECIALIZED IN CHILDLESSNESS.

REFER TO PEER SUPPORT.