

A lit candle in a purple holder. The candle is white and has a jagged, melted top. The flame is bright yellow and orange. The background is dark and out of focus, showing some purple fabric.

Self-Care Ritual

After Disappointment or Loss
on the Fertility Journey

To my fellow pilgrims,

Many of us on the fertility journey know well the sting of a negative pregnancy test, the grueling delays in the process, or the searing grief of an early pregnancy loss. If you've been on this journey for a while, you have probably developed some strategies and skills around picking yourself back up again after getting knocked off course. Maybe you surround yourself with loved ones or reach out to those who have walked a similar path because you simply can't handle doing this alone anymore. Maybe you've drawn inward because you are exhausted by the constant check-ins of well-meaning friends. Maybe you try to stay as busy as possible to maintain some sense of normalcy or maybe you take a day or two off of work to focus on you. Maybe you look ahead to the next cycle or maybe you're on a break. Perhaps you see this loss as bringing you one step closer to your baby or maybe your hope becomes a little more fragile. There is no right or wrong way to navigate these disappointments and detours so long as you do so with the greatest compassion and respect for yourself and all that you have been through.

In my work as a spiritual care provider and as a woman on my own fertility journey, I have witnessed time and time again the healing nature of naming the hard parts of what is or what has been in order to turn toward hope once again. Working through a disappointment or loss is a process, one we sometimes don't want to engage in for fear of getting stuck in despair. And yet what I know to be true for myself and have seen in the stories of others is that when we acknowledge the pain we can move through it and come out the other side with deeper peace and a greater capacity for joy.

This simple ritual is written especially for you, my fellow pilgrims on the fertility journey. Take what resonates and leave what doesn't.

Trust that you know what you need.
You are not alone.
Deep healing and peace be yours.

Sincerely,

Alicia

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Simple Self-Care Ritual after Disappointment or Loss

Carve out a quiet moment for yourself, perhaps at the beginning or end of your day, maybe before or after your yoga or meditation practice. You can engage in this short ritual on your own or you may choose to invite one or two supportive people to join you.

Begin by lighting a candle. This may be a candle that you've chosen especially for this occasion or it may just be any candle you have around the house. If you have an altar, place it there; otherwise, just sit with the candle in front of you or hold it in your hands. Take a few deep breaths as you observe the warmth and glow of the candle's light. If it feels right to you, allow the candle to invoke God, a divine presence, or the love in your life.

Read the following either silently or out loud. Breathe in the words by taking a deep breath after each phrase. If there are any words that feel particularly poignant, stay with them a while, breathing deeply:

I acknowledge the painful reality of (name what has happened in your own words, ie. not getting pregnant this cycle, losing this pregnancy, etc.).

I feel the ache and I offer myself unconditional loving-kindness:

May I be gentle with myself in this tender place.

May I seek that which is nurturing and supports my well-being.

May I embrace my tears for all the healing they bring.

May I be aware of the sources of compassion in my life and willingly receive love.

May I trust the truth: (fill in an affirmation - the one that's hardest to believe right now)

May my broken heart be transformed into a more open heart.

May my faith in the wisdom of my body be restored.

May I be at peace - body, mind, heart and spirit.

If you have lost a pregnancy and desire to mark that in some way, here are some ideas:

- Choose a symbol, a tangible reminder that your pregnancy and their presence was real even if it was brief. You can keep it near you, put it in a special place, or choose to release it back to the earth or body of water. Some ideas: a necklace, candle, stone, feather, flower/plant/tree, figure or sculpture, baby item, image, etc.
- You may choose a name for the child. Sometimes a name will come to mind or be given to you.
- Prayer of commendation: *Creator/Loving God/Source of Life/Universal Spirit* (or other name for the sacred), *I release this little one/life/embryo* (or other name for who/what was lost) *into your loving embrace.*

- Prayer for comfort: *God/Spirit of Compassion, may your comforting presence tend the wounded, raw and empty places in me. Heal my broken heart and renew my hope so that when the heaviness of this grief eases, I may return fully to life once again. Amen.*

Notice if there is anything else you need to say or do for yourself during this time.

In closing, return your attention to the candle. Name the lights that shine in your darkness in an act of gratitude.

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

John 1:5, Bible, NRSV

“There is a crack in everything. That’s how the light gets in.”

Leonard Cohen

“People are like stained glass windows.
They sparkle and shine when the sun is out, but when the darkness sets in,
their beauty is revealed only if there is a light from within.”

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross