

A TALKING POINTS LESSON FOR
ENGLISH READING & SPEAKING



CHILDLESS
OR
CHILD-FREE

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Childless or Child Free?.....	4
Reading Comprehension Questions.....	7
Essential Vocabulary.....	8
Discussion Questions.....	10
Credits.....	11

Introduction

Should all women give birth? Is this their role in life?

How are women with no children regarded in your culture?

How about men with no children?

Childless or Child Free?

Today, half of all UK women under the age of thirty do not have children.

In America, there has been a sharp decline in childbirth since the 2008 recession.

Compare that with the statistics in the post-war period and we can see a clear trend in the world today regarding women and raising children.

Women today seem happy to postpone having children until it is biologically impossible to have children.

Many simply do not wish to have children.

Women today just don't want to have kids.

What is going on?

The first question we need to ask is: **Is a woman defined by being a mother?**

Is that all she is?

Given the times we live in, are women not capable of other things in life apart from giving birth and rearing children?

We also need to be careful of the language we use around this sensitive subject — ***there is a big difference between childless***

and child-free.

The former has a more negative, old-fashioned meaning, while the latter has a more modern, positive meaning.

Be careful of which one you use...

In a recent interview, the British actress Helen Mirren was referred to as childless by a journalist.

But Mirren regards herself as child-free.

She claims she has no interest in motherhood and that not having children was a choice by her alone.

This is why women who decide to be child-free express concerns about the words people use regarding their life choices.

They have made a choice to not have children — ***so they are child-free.***

To them, the word childless is archaic. It conjures up a past where people used terms such as 'barren' or 'old maid'.

Women may not have any children for any number of reasons, but it mostly comes down to two — **financial or reproductive.**

If the woman and her family are unable to support a child, then that could be a very good reason why she doesn't have a child.

And if she is physically unable to have a baby, then the choice has been made for her.

But the stigma still remains.

Regardless of whether she chooses to remain child-free or through outside influences, she is childless. There is still a huge stigma in a woman not being a mother.

In many countries — ***even in very advanced cultures*** — there is a great deal of shame in a woman not having a child.

There may be great pressure from the woman's family to have a baby. And in some cultures, it is just expected that the woman will get pregnant and have a baby.

There could also be religious demands.

But we have to understand and come to terms with the modern idea that many women are making the choice to not have a baby and remain, not childless, but child-free.

Reading Comprehension Questions

What is an important statistic about childbirth in the UK?

In America, are people having more or fewer children?

What could be the reason for this?

Why do we need to be careful what language we use when talking about women and children?

Which term is more positive — childless or child-free?

Which famous British actress does the article mention?

How does she regard herself?

Does she want to be a mother?

Did she decide not to have kids? Or did someone else make the choice for her?

If women make a choice not to have kids, are they childless or child-free?

Name some old-fashioned words that have similar meanings to childless.

What are the two most common reasons that women do not have children?

Do some countries put shame on women for not having children?

Essential Vocabulary

a sharp decline	childbirth	recession
compare	statistics	post-war
trend	to postpone	biologically
defined	capable	rearing
sensitive	childless	child-free
old-fashioned	latter	interview
referred	journalist	to claim
motherhood	archaic	conjures
barren	old maid	financial
reproductive	to support	physically unable
stigma	remains	regardless
influences	religious	come to terms

Exercise

Write down all the words and phrases in your vocabulary notebook. Look in your dictionary and find the meaning of each word. Write the definition next to each word.

Then make up your own sentences using each word or phrase.

For example:

Notebook—*a small book with pages of blank paper that*

students use to make notes when studying.

“I left my notebook at home so I was unable to make any notes in my English class.”

Discussion Questions

What do people in your country think of women who do not have children?

In your country or culture, should women have children? Why?

What do you think has caused the sharp decline in women having children in the UK and America?

Do you think the term childless is old-fashioned?

Do you think this term is disrespectful?

Name your reasons.

Do you think the term child-free is acceptable?

Name your reasons.

What other terms could we use to describe a woman without children?

If women continue to not have children, what could happen to the population of the world?

Is this a good or bad thing?

Name your reasons.

Do you want to have children in the future? Why/why not?

If you don't have children, what would your family think about this? How would they react?

Credits

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