

## 3 Critical Decision-Making Secrets

Tools to help you unlock confusion and get crystal clear on one of the most important decisions you'll make in your life



### Do You Wonder if Parenthood is For You?

Are you asking yourself:

- Do I feel called to be a parent?
- Is being a father something that's meant for me?
- Is being a mother something I'm just supposed to do?
- What would my life look like with a family — and can I have the life I most want?
- Is becoming a mother something I'm only supposed to do if I have that "I want to be a mom," yearning feeling?
- Can I be the father I really want to be?
- Or do I want to want to become a parent because it's what others expect from me?

Your answers to these questions may have something to do with the direct or indirect messages you received growing up via your parents, grandparents, or society-at-large. What if you want to be a mom or a dad but don't have that maternal or paternal feeling or yearning for it? What if you yearn for it but don't want it? Then what?

Please consider the possibility that parenthood is **ONLY** something you'll decide to pursue if it's something you **REALLY** want to do. What if the *only* deciding factor is **YOUR** desire and **YOUR** decision alone? *What if it's truly about what you want and not about anything other than that?*

Hopefully, that sounds quite good to you. However, it's only going to sound good to you if you've made a decision about parenthood! It's not going to sound exciting if you haven't decided whether or not you want children. So...

# Do You Want to Be a Parent or Do You Want a Childfree Life?

If you don't know the answer to this question and you've been struggling with indecision for any length of time, then continue reading...

It's likely that you've experienced some kind of turmoil about this for a while. Not knowing whether you want to be a parent, raise children, have children, or live childfree is upsetting on many levels. You probably avoid thinking about it because it's too painful or you just hope that when this or that falls into place, you'll know your decision. Or you hope it'll just go away or that it'll resolve itself over time.

I'd like to share with you **3 Critical Decision-Making Secrets** that will help you move in the direction of an ultimate decision. The following ideas may seem contrary to popular belief or just plain counterintuitive. Hopefully, this new knowledge will ease some of the pain of *not knowing*! It can feel quite lonely and torturous at times. I know because I've spent thousands of hours over 30 years listening to the pain and tears of women and men who've struggled with not knowing whether they want children or to be a parent.

I've helped women and men move from confusion to clarity by guiding them step-by-step through my **Motherhood and Fatherhood Clarity Courses** based on the book I co-authored with Denise L. Carlini, ***Motherhood—Is It For Me?*** We created the foundation for these programs in 1991. Since then, countless women and men have been guided to clarity.

Before I point out these 3 secrets that get in the way of deciding, I want you to understand the approach that ***Motherhood—Is It For Me?*** takes regarding decision-making about this issue. Before you can make a decision, you have to know first what you *want* or what you *desire*. A decision can only be considered after that, but not before your own desire is crystal clear. Desire and decision must be teased apart — discovering your desire is a different process from thinking about your decision, and they must be looked at separately. In these programs, we go in-depth about how to do this (I mention this so you have a context for what you are about to read).

The following 3 concepts all play a part in you *discovering your desire for parenthood*. As I stated, your desire needs to be figured out **before** you can entertain a decision. If you try to do both at the same time your mind will freeze, and you'll experience gridlock and stay stuck.

I chose these **3 Critical Decision-Making Secrets** to share with you so that you can learn to identify common difficulties in the moment they are happening. They all overlap at times but looking at each separately will provide the most clarity. Once identified, you can follow through with the recommendations offered in each section and disengage from what is not helpful and *begin doing something that will actually make a difference!* You'll be able to mute the noise of your unhelpful thoughts that are keeping you stuck and turn up the volume of a mind that is systematically moving in the direction of clarity.

# SECRET #1

## Thinking ‘harder’ isn’t going to get you the answer faster

There’s a common belief that if you can’t decide, the problem lies with how you think about parenthood and that you’re just thinking about it wrong. It’s easy to believe the message that if you just focus better, the answer will come. But it’s just *not true* that if you crunch your forehead and think harder, you’ll figure it out! Not only is this thinking false, but doing so will keep you from discovering the answers you want.

Of course, you’re not alone in believing, “I just have to focus.” Many women and men don’t know what they want when it comes to deciding about parenthood, despite strong messages from a pro-natalist society that says you should want children and have them. It can be confusing, and some people feel bad for not knowing what they want. Some people may draw the conclusion that being indecisive or confused means you shouldn’t be a parent. (This is NOT an indicator that you shouldn’t be a parent. It’s only an indicator that you don’t yet know your heart’s desire.) Thinking about it “harder” can be one strategy to stop feeling bad. Unfortunately, it just doesn’t work in the long run!

If you’re racking your brain over and over and not getting anywhere, there’s something else in the way of your knowing. The truth is, when you’re upset because of not knowing something that you so desperately want to know, you can assume there’s an emotional component that is not being addressed. Right now, you may not know what that is, and thinking harder isn’t going to bring it to light. What is more likely is that you will *feel* your way to the answer, rather than think your way there. The information you want is in your heart, not your worried head. It’s like climbing a mountain and expecting to find a whale at the peak. It won’t happen. You’re looking in the wrong place.

What do you think will happen if you stop contemplating this issue and stop trying so hard to know? You’ll probably have some emotions that surface which feel uncomfortable. Emotions of sadness or anger may surface. If that’s the case, there’s nothing to do but breathe into the emotions and let them be in your body and your heart — it’s going to be okay. Breathe through them. That is the best thing you can do with emotions. They will move through you if you can be with them without trying to make them go away. And yes, it’s easier said than done. It’s uncomfortable but it’s nothing you can’t handle.

## Succinctly said:

When you think about this question and you feel urgent or “gripped”— as if you must know right now, this is your cue that you are off course. No good comes from remaining in this state of mind. Thinking “harder” won’t help. Do your best to disengage from the urgency and take a step back and accept what you don’t know and make peace with it. Assume there’s a good reason why you don’t know your desire and therefore have not yet decided on parenthood.

## Recommendation:

Once you find yourself thinking too hard or you feel gripped, take a deep breath down to your toes. Say to yourself, *“The truth is, I don’t know the answer to this question today. However, I have known many things before, and I will figure this issue out eventually. There is help available to me. I am not alone.”* Then redirect your mind to what you do know. Make a list of the things that you do know to be true without having to think hard. Try to recall the times when you easily knew something was true; this will help you relax your mind. Don’t be surprised if when your mind is relaxed you may experience feelings of sadness or loss. If this happens, see if you can let yourself sit with the feelings without trying to do anything about them. It’s always good to write when feeling emotional. Writing will help you process the feelings so they don’t stay churning inside of you.

# SECRET #2

Making a case for YES and a case for NO will keep you stuck

Please don't get me wrong; lists of pros and cons are not all bad. The idea that you make a list of the pros and cons of parenthood, see a visual representation of which list is longer, and then go with the long list *can* make sense. This can be a good idea... if it works. However, once you're doing this for the third, fourth, or umpteenth time and it's not bringing you clarity, it's not working. Doing it one more time is *not* the solution.

I want to speak to **two reasons** why making a case for YES and a case for NO when you're already feeling anxious or worried or upset actually keeps you stuck:

- The **first reason** is that when you're making your lists, you're focused on what you already know, not on what you don't know. Obviously, you can't know what you don't know! When you keep the focus on what you do know over and over again, you lose access to new information you need that will help you discover your heart's desire.
- The **second reason** is about the function the list-making serves. Continuing to make a case for yes and a case for no keeps you away from feeling the pain of ambivalence. This may not be true for everyone; however, I've found in the many years I've been working with people on this issue that making these lists feels more comfortable than sitting with ambivalence. No one wants to feel the shame of not knowing.

Certainly, there's no shame in not knowing! However, societal messages say you should "just know." **Ambivalence can feel far more uncomfortable than the frustration of being stuck in the rut of list-making.** Even though the process of making these lists is getting you nowhere, at least you're not feeling the pain of ambivalence!

However, the upside of ambivalence is, if we can let ourselves feel ambivalent, we are open to new information. Opening ourselves up to uncertainty is what allows us to move closer to our heart's desire. Do your best to make friends with the discomfort of not knowing and trust there are good reasons you don't know yet.

At some point, **after** you've already done the work to uncover your desire about being a parent or not, your decision-making process may include looking at a list of YES and a list of NO to

parenthood. Again, if you're feeling any degree of frustration, torment, annoyance, or irritation because you don't know, then absolutely ***do not make a pros and cons list!*** At this point, it will only sink you further into confusion and feeling worse about yourself. It is only when you feel relaxed, at peace, curious, and easy on the inside, combined with knowing your true heart's desire, that it may be helpful to make the list!

#### Succinctly said:

Creating a case for YES followed by creating a case for NO will only create gridlock in your brain. The function it serves mostly is to protect you from feeling ambivalent. Ambivalence for many is very uncomfortable and most people will do just about anything to avoid the feeling. The problem is that most people are not consciously aware they're avoiding ambivalence because they're working so hard to figure out the answer! Basically, STOP making lists and let yourself be in that place of ambivalence or not knowing.

#### Recommendation:

When you're in a more relaxed state you're open to new information. So, how do you make peace with ambivalence and not knowing and get into a more relaxed state? Make friends with the discomfort of not knowing. In fact, as nutty as it sounds, actually decide to *not know* on purpose! Say to yourself, "*At the risk of feeling uncomfortable, I will decide to not know on purpose. I want to make peace with this state of being before I do anything else. As soon as it doesn't feel so bad, I will have access to more information that I haven't previously had access to.*" Also, list 5-10 decisions you've previously made that you feel good about. Write a few sentences on each one describing the sensation of how good it felt to have known your truth and to have made the decision that felt right for you.

# SECRET #3

## Judging yourself keeps you further away from knowing what you want to do

When we are judging ourselves, it is very difficult to think clearly! The painful truth is: you don't know whether you want to be a parent or live a childfree life. It's also true that you shouldn't be blamed for not knowing. Certainly, you are accountable for figuring it out, but that is very different from being blamed for struggling with the decision.

When you're feeling frustrated or (even worse) judging yourself, it's almost impossible to figure out if you want to be a parent. If you're mad at yourself because you can't figure this out, you won't find any answers. In this case, most of us would prefer to be mad at the world rather than ourselves.

If you're judging yourself, I'm sure it started outside of you first. Others have probably judged you for not knowing. Most people are not comfortable with ambivalence, so if you're experiencing ambivalence and you express it publicly or even to a few close friends, you may be the recipient of someone else's discomfort in the form of criticism or sarcasm.

### Judging yourself may sound like any of the following:

- "I've always been a bad decision maker."
- "I'm so selfish all I care about is my time to myself and my sleep."
- "Everyone else seems to know, why can't I? What's wrong with me?"
- "Why am I the only one who can't decide?"
- "I'm such a loser."
- "Why can't I just...?"

Even if you're chronically hard on yourself, you can turn this behavior around with a little help. Being hard on yourself isn't who you inherently are. Accepting that nothing is wrong with you will go a long way.

*It's okay that you don't know.* You may not agree with this statement, or it may not feel good to read but I can assure you it's true. If you're reading this, it's likely you've been searching for answers for some time. Well, now it's time to breathe, accept that you don't know the answer,

and trust that you're going to be okay. The answers will come to you even if they haven't before. I can say this with confidence because I've seen the answers come to so many people I've worked with as they let go of the struggle and embrace the validity of not knowing.

That's the starting point. You may need help discovering your true desire and, contrary to popular belief, it's fine to get help with this. Stop thinking so hard. Breathe and accept that you don't know the answer.

#### Succinctly said:

It's not so easy to just stop judging yourself because someone says, "Stop judging yourself." It's important to first understand why that might be the case. Sometimes it's easier to be mad at yourself than to actually feel the sadness and loneliness of not being able to make this really important decision. It's not helpful for you to judge yourself. It would cause you pain to see someone you love judging themselves in the same way.

#### Recommendation:

When we're hurting and it's difficult to sit with the pain, I find writing letters to be one of the best ways to slow emotions down and find some compassion inside for ourselves. Write a letter to you from you:

*"Dear Self, I know it's been hard not knowing whether you want to be a parent or not. I'm sorry it has been hard. You're good and you deserve compassion with this issue. It's a complicated one even on a good day."* etc... (and continue to write whatever comes to mind).

Write from a place of compassion. The kind of compassion that is easy to show your best friend or someone you care deeply about. Think about the times you felt proud of yourself, beginning from when you were very young and write them down.

# IN CLOSING

These secrets are part of the first step toward knowing: accepting that you don't know AND doing it without any judgment of yourself. I know this is easier said than done. **It's truly okay that you don't know the answer.** You may not like the fact that you don't know and you may feel bad about it. There is a good reason you can't figure this out even if you don't know why that is. That is the key. Assume the reason you don't know is a good one. Right now, today, you don't need to know what that good reason is.

**Don't** think "harder."

**Don't** make a case for yes and no.

**Don't** judge yourself.

**Do** think about what you've done well.

**Do** be okay with not knowing the answer.

**Do** remember the meaningful decisions you've already made.

From this more relaxed place, you're more likely to access new information that will help you know your true desire for parenthood. If you want to go deeper with these decision-making concepts, everything that I've mentioned is addressed in-depth throughout the [Motherhood Clarity Course™](#) and [Fatherhood Clarity Course™](#). Both of these online group courses support you while you work through the book, [Motherhood—Is It For Me? Your Step-by-Step Guide to Clarity](#), by Denise L. Carlini & Ann Davidman.

In these courses you'll learn to focus on what your heart desires before you begin to think about a decision. Your hand will be held, and you'll be guided step-by-step so you can make a decision that feels right for you.

I hope something here was helpful to you. If you'd like more help with your next step toward knowing your truth about parenthood, either buy the book, *Motherhood—Is It For Me?* and work through it on your own, join one of Ann's online group Clarity Courses, or **work with Ann privately.**

You might not be able to make a definitive decision today about parenthood...

However, the decision you can make today is to

**STOP struggling and  
GET the help you deserve!**