



Insight Series

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For Those with Loved Ones or Friends Struggling With Infertility

Infertility is a life crisis. It is a difficult time, full of doubt, grief, and loss. It's loss that most people don't understand. Yet every month that your loved ones get a negative pregnancy test result, their grief and sense of loss become deeper. What started as a cut or scrape is now a gaping wound. Just when they start to feel better, they have another negative pregnancy test, and the wound is reopened - even deeper this time. It can be hard for family and friends to watch their loved ones struggle, especially during the holidays. So, here are some helpful tips you can use to best support your loved ones during the holidays, and beyond.

1. **Don't bring up the subject.** If your loved ones dealing with infertility want to discuss it, they'll bring it up. Perhaps, they don't feel comfortable discussing it at a holiday gathering. Maybe some members of the family don't know and they don't want the subject to come up in front of them. I think asking the couple how they are feeling is an appropriate question, but asking them when their next doctor's appointment is or when their next treatment is scheduled for are inappropriate questions, unless they bring the subject of infertility up first. If you ask how we're doing or how we're feeling, and we want to discuss what's new in our fertility journey, we will. If not, respect our decision to move the conversation in a different direction. While we're at it, don't ask anyone at the holiday gathering (or ever!) when they

are planning on having children. It's a personal, intimate topic, and you don't know what people are struggling with privately. It's also not your business.

2. **You don't have to say anything.** I know it is human nature to want to offer advice when a loved one is struggling with something. But unless you've also been through infertility, please resist the urge to offer advice. Recognize that you don't understand what the couple is feeling. But you can respect them and support them by saying something like "I'm so sorry you're going through this," or "I am here for you," or, my absolute favorite, "How can I support you?" I love this question because it gives me the chance to respond by saying that I don't need anything other than their ear - no advice, just an open mind to listen to me when I'm sad. The advice I get from those who haven't been through infertility often makes me feel judged. Lots of well-meaning people have tried to tell me how I should be feeling or what I should be doing. Especially at your holiday gatherings, the best you can do for your loved ones with infertility is let them know you support them, but please don't offer them any advice.
3. **Also, definitely don't say...** "it'll happen eventually" or "when it's meant to be, it will happen" or "it could always be worse" or "don't think about next month right now." Once you're part of Club Infertility, there's no guarantee that having a baby will, in fact, eventually happen. Also, who gets to be the judge of what is the worst thing that could

happen to someone? Your loved ones going through infertility are allowed to be sad about it, even if they seemingly have an otherwise wonderful life. Don't tell them how it could always be worse because you know a couple who has had failed IUIs and several unsuccessful IVF cycles as well as multiple pregnancy losses. That serves to minimize the pain that we feel right now, as well as make us feel like you don't think we are allowed to be sad or grieve our current situation. Also, telling us not to worry about next month is impossible when we're paying for expensive treatments and wondering whether, in my case, my work travel schedule will keep me away while I'm ovulating, thereby prolonging the time we spend involuntarily childless. When in doubt, simply listen.

4. **Recognize that it may be difficult for us to see pictures or videos of your babies.** Especially during the holidays. The cute holiday cards showcasing your children or holiday themed pregnancy announcements or gender reveals are difficult for us to see. Keep in mind that we're not just receiving your cards, but cards from all of our friends who are pregnant or have children. The totality of that can be extremely hard, and be yet another reminder for the couple of what they don't have, but want so badly. It is yet another example of how inescapable the emotional triggers are. This doesn't mean we love your children any less. It just means we need some grace from you during this stage of our lives.
5. **Understand we may decline certain invites.** The event may be too hard. We may know there will be several pregnant women or babies at this holiday gathering. Again, extend grace, not judgment. We need to be a little selfish right now to keep ourselves afloat.

Ultimately, this holiday season, and every day, your loved ones dealing with infertility will be most grateful for your support. Please don't judge our grief or tell us how we should be feeling - or how you would handle things if you were in our shoes. The most important thing you can do for your family or friend struggling is just be there and be present with an open mind.

If you are interested in speaking with writer directly please send emails to InfertiliTalk@gmail.com.