Emotional Responses to Infertility

AUSTRALIAN CONCEPT FERTILITY CENTRE

The experience of infertility can push you to the edge of a crisis, both emotionally and physically. This pressure is compounded by the fact that the perception of a social stigma surrounding infertility means that few people are able to discuss their experiences openly.

Emotional responses vary but you will probably find it helpful to use the same strategies now that you have used to deal with other problems in your life. The help that you gain can come from outside yourself: by reaching out to friends whom you know you can talk to and trust, by becoming involved in support groups by talking to professionals and by reading books. But perhaps the most useful help you can get is the help that comes from within yourself. Try to maintain your sense of humour and remember that you are a worthwhile person. Value and care for yourself, whatever happens, whether you are able to have a baby or not.

The present may seem black but you will recover. You will find that you do have the capacity to survive this experience. At times in the future the feelings of deep sadness and regret may return. This is to be expected in a sensitive, feeling person. However, it will no longer be the central focus of your life.

The emotional responses to the crisis of infertility are not however only the result of social pressures; they may also flow from your own life experience. This will vary depending upon your past and present relationships, your individual personality and many other factors such as your expectations of adult life, your cultural background and religious faith. Some of the wide range of emotions you may experience with the discovery that you have fertility problems are expressed very clearly in comments like these;

"My husband and I have been trying to have a child for five years now, and feel very isolated in our despair and heartache."

"It's hard to explain the wanting inside myself; wanting to have another child so desperately."

"There was no-one else to talk to who understood the anger, frustration, disappointment and fears."

"It's pretty frightening just bursting into tears when there are lots of kids around."

"We kid ourselves with contraception that we have control over our bodies. The hardest thing is to lose that control. You feel as if your body has caught you out."

What sorts of emotions then, are you likely to experience when you discover that you have a fertility problem? One of the emotions that may confront you is a strong sense of surprise. Infertility, as we said earlier, may have been something you never even thought about.

Because of this it may take you quite a while to fully realise its implications. One way you may attempt to deal with this crisis is to convince yourself that for you it is not a big problem. Often the pain of this experience is so intense that you may not be able to cope with it all at once.

Thus you may deny that you feel upset by your fertility problems; and you may even deny that you ever wanted children in the first place. While these emotions can cause you to delay seeking assistance, they may also be useful in that they help you to gradually realise what the experience of infertility will mean to you.

It is important to stress here that not everyone experiences all these losses, and your experience of them may differ greatly from the experiences of others.

Some of the losses associated with infertility are even more difficult to define. Waiting for treatment and the continual hope that "this will be the time" can leave your emotions painfully suspended, creating a continual "hoping against hope" attitude. The nature of infertility is such that you may never know definitely whether you are able to conceive or what is causing the problem. Your grief therefore has nothing to focus on and this frustration can place great strain upon your relationship.

Infertility therefore is an experience that continually fluctuates in intensity and directions, so that at different times you may have different needs and experience different emotions. There are no set "stages" in this experience, and while at one time your emotions can be mystifying and frighteningly intense, at another you may simply feel numb. There may be moments when being infertile dictates every facet of your life, whilst at other times you may act to change the direction of your life. The way you learn to deal with the experience of infertility will also be different at different times. One day a particular strategy may help you a lot, but later on you may find it useless. At times you may find the pain you experience very destructive, but at others you may find it a useful motivating force in your life.

It is important to acknowledge that emotional responses to infertility vary greatly, as do people's methods of coping with them. Each person has to find their own way of coping with their situation, and sometimes might need help to do this.

Concept Fertility Centre's trained staff are always willing to listen to you and talk to you. Our counsellor is always available should you feel the need to meet with her.

PLEASE DON'T HESITATE TO ASK



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