kindbody

Supporting Your Relationships

Through Fertility Challenges



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Meeting with family and friends during the holidays can be a wonderful flash point to reminisce upon fond memories, to nurture familiar connections, to renew traditions, and to get caught up on all that is happening in everyone's lives.

But what happens when you are not ready to share sensitive private information about yourself? What happens when talking about your updates can emotionally open Pandora's box for you and your partner? Or if someone else's life updates trigger you?

This is the pain point that so many of us face when we experience fertility challenges.

We can anticipate with anxiety that our well-meaning family members will intentionally or unintentionally ask the question or share an update that triggers us emotionally. Additionally, we hope that our partners do not share sensitive information and hold themselves together emotionally with people who you would prefer not to know. Suddenly, the holidays can feel less like a safe retreat with loved ones, but rather like a firing squad of pressure, judgment and even humiliation.

So, let's take a deep breath to acknowledge what we're going through (seriously.... breathe in deeply... breathe out deeply... good) and now let's dive right in to how to reintroduce safety so you can be emotionally present with your partner and family during the valleys of your fertility journey.

Tips for You and Your Partner

Emotional safety begins with the both of you. However, it is not unusual that when fertility challenges arise, partners tend to deal with the burden in their own ways. This can manifest itself in one of three ways:

1. One-Way Traffic
One partner exclusively becomes "the person to be consoled" and the other solely plays the role of consoler.

2. Two-Way Mayhem
Both partners have a need to share their hurt but cannot access the empathy required to support each other as a unit (and so they battle each other).

3. Nobody's Home
Communication can break down where neither of the two is communicating how their fertility challenges are affecting them.

Four Principles for Couples to Live By On Their Fertility Journey

Grace
The fertility journey is happening to the both of you, but the one thing that can soften the bumps as you ride this roller coaster is to know that you both will approach you best and worst days with empathy and compassion. With everything happening in the world it reminds us of how precious time, freedom and who we love really is.

Unity
You both must be a safe haven for each other to express yourselves via healthy discussion, i.e. no blame, no shame, no criticism nor character assassination. The faster that you both authentically believe that you are on the same side is the faster that you can start identifying the complex ways in which the fertility journey is affecting you individually and as a couple.

Stretching
The fertility journey requires emotional stretching in that you will need to be prioritizing being there for you partner in the way that they need support. This can be very challenging given the weight of the hurt that you are carrying yourself. However, remember that you only get through the fertility journey successfully if you do so together.

Lean In/Lean Out Communication
In couples communication, there tend to be maximizers and minimizers. In very simple terms, those who tend to share a lot more of what they're feeling and can dominate the conversation are the maximizers. Then, there are those who tend to be quieter during a discussion, sharing only when deemed necessary. Note that this dynamic can shift between partners from one topic of conversation to another, so it's not as important to box yourselves permanently into one of the two categories as it is to understand the flow of the conversation. Think of it as holding the microphone when you are talking. If you are holding it for a substantial period of time, then it's time for you to lean out and let them take a stab at communicating using the three previous principles of grace, stretching, and unity. Alternatively, if you are the one who tends to be more passive on a particular topic, it's time to lean in to the conversation, be vulnerable, and share how you are feeling. Give your partner the chance to be there for you. So, grab your partner and commit to lifting each other up using these principles.

Six Steps to Manage Family Members, Gatherings and Other Events That Might Be Emotionally Triggering for You

1. Scenario Planning
Talk with your partner beforehand about the issues that you are just not ready to share with others—and why.

2. Co-Create Solutions
Co-create answers and diversions if and when they come up. If you get surprised by one in real time, huddle up and co-create an alternative way to navigate the scenario (remember: no blame, shame, or guilt).

3. Identify Your Safe Havens
Decide who your shared safe havens are that can hold the space for you if you decide that you want to share things selectively with certain people in confidence.

4. Follow-Through
Come to each other's aide when they need it. No questions asked. Develop a hand signal, send a text, but if one of you is triggered, both of you are triggered. Be the cavalry coming over the hill for your partner. Also, do not make snap judgments to share if you are not sure.

5. Isolate When Necessary
If you have been triggered, find your partner or safe haven and take a few minutes to isolate and process with them until you feel safe again. If you have to leave suddenly that's okay. Trust that your, or your partner's, mental health matters most at this moment.

6. Empathy Debrief
After the gathering, debrief with your partner maintaining the perspective of your four guiding principles. This is where empathy and being there for each other matters most.