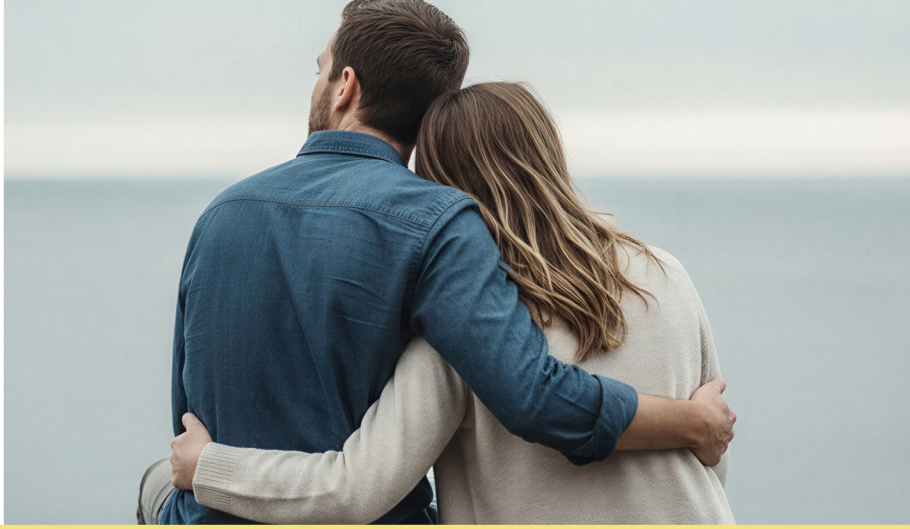
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Supporting a Loved One

Through Infertility



Written by Dr. Tonya Wood

It can be really difficult to know what to say or do to comfort a friend or family member who is dealing with infertility. The experience of infertility, pregnancy loss, and third-party reproduction is a complicated process that brings out a variety of thoughts and emotions. Witnessing the pain of our loved ones is challenging and no matter how kind, caring and compassionate one is, caregivers are left feeling incapable of improving the situation for their loved ones.

However, there are many ways loved ones can support someone going through infertility. One common experience frequently reported by individuals and couples dealing with infertility is the sense of loneliness and shame that accompanies their family building journey. Letting loved ones know that they are not alone goes a long way in improving their social and emotional well-being. Here are just a few small steps that one can take to being part of a support system that decreases that loneliness and shame.

"I'm here for whatever you need"

Be Present.

One of the greatest gifts you can give to someone who is grieving a loss or struggling with infertility is to just let them know that you are there —physically and emotionally. Everyone copes differently with pain and loss, so tell your friend that "I'm here for whatever you need" whether that is a 2am phone call, a quiet walk, or just a shoulder to cry on." It may seem cliché but just "being" with someone especially during moments of pain is a great source of support. Also, don't underestimate the value of "small gestures with big meaning." Managing some of the day-to-day tasks such as washing the dishes, walking the dog, or making dinner without being asked communicates that you're physically present as well. It sends the message that "I see you're going through a lot so let me lift your burden a little bit."

Be Present, Without Being Pushy.

Avoid the temptation to offer unsolicited advice. The well-intended advice or recommendations of loved ones can often bring out more pain. While we aim to cheer up our friends and family, refrain from talking about your aunt's cousin's friend who got pregnant when they "stopped trying." Unless specifically asked, do not forward or share an article about the latest miracle infertility drug that has been discovered. Trust me, no one is doing more research on how to conceive than your loved one. If your loved one is looking for some advice, wait for them to ask your opinion.



Be Real.

Because we care so much and want to make things better for our loved ones, we search for the perfect words to say or the right thing to do. Instead, just be honest and say: "I have no idea how this must feel" or "I don't know what to say." This honest and vulnerability of your emotions opens the space for your loved one to talk about their experience in their own words, space, and time.

"I don't know what to say"

Be OKAY With Their Pain (And Yours).

It is hard to witness someone we care about be in pain, so it is very understandable that our initial reaction is to point out a silver lining or be positive. Yet comments like "you can always adopt" can also feel very dismissive and invalidating.

Be okay sitting with your wife, sister, brother, or friend in their pain. Not only is it helpful to them know that you see their sadness, be open and expressive about your own emotions. Sharing your sadness and grief can reduce their isolation and loneliness. Yet also know your limits. If talking about and expressing emotions seem overwhelming, reach out for your own professional counseling and support.

Be Patient.

Infertility is a private and personal journey that affects everyone differently. Even couples who are on this journey together may find themselves managing the emotions involved in different ways. Talking about infertility and pregnancy loss can be difficult because of the shame and embarrassment that often accompany these experiences. When offering support to a friend or family member, be mindful that your loved one is on their own timeline in terms of when and how they want to share the highs and lows of this journey. If you have already followed some of the steps listed above, they know you are there for them and available whenever they need