

Infertility and Your Relationship

Infertility places tremendous pressure on a couple. Some couples become closer, while others feel they are drifting apart. During my training with Dr. Alice Domar (Psychologist) in 2016 she commented that the top three things couples argue about in general are money, sex and

kids...interesting, infertility boxes off all three together

Infertility treatment ain't cheap so can lead to a lot of sacrifice in other area's of life and all the fun things like holidays, romantic weekends away and eating out in nice restaurants can take a hit. Tough decisions have to be made which causes conflict and it begins to feel like the sole reason for having sex is only to make a baby which plays havoc with our sex lives.

For me the diagnosis of infertility was the first major stumbling block of married life and thankfully we are still happily married but it wasn't easy at times. It was hard enough dealing with myself and my own emotions let alone trying to figure out what was going on in my husbands head but I did try! Not to generalize but typically men don't talk about the emotional stuff! No disrespect guys!

Do you remember the book, *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus (1992)* by American author and relationship counsellor John Gray? I have taken this extract from Wikipedia...

"Gray talks about the difference in the way the genders react to stres



s. When male tolerance to stressful situations is exceeded, they withdraw temporarily, "retreating into their cave", so to speak. They literally retreat to switch off: for example, to the garage, or to go spend time with friends. In their "caves", men (writes Gray) are not necessarily focussed on the problem at hand. Yet this "time-out" lets them distance themselves from the problem and relax, allowing them to re-examine the problem later from a fresh perspective.

Gray holds that male retreat into the cave has historically been hard for women to understand. When women become unduly stressed, their natural reaction is to talk with someone close about it (even if talking doesn't provide a solution to the problem at hand). This sets up a natural dynamic where the man retreats as the woman tries to get closer, which becomes a major source of conflict between them."

I thought this brief psychology lesson from Gray & Domar would help set the scene. The genders are different beasts and deal with their challenges or problems in different ways. But it

drives us women crazy! I think the additional issue with infertility is that we don't really want to talk about it outside of our relationship for a variety of reasons, so we talk to our partners about it all the time which can lead to tension, frustration, anger, resentment and so on, especially when it seems they are less keen or interested.

So if you feel your relationship is suffering as a result of infertility here is some guidance to help you...

- Acknowledge your partners concerns and fears and accept they may be different to yours
- Ask how he or she feels or what it is like for them
- Listen and actually hear them...try not listen with the intent of responding, *just listen*
- Remember give some time and space, we don't all process information and feelings in the same manner and timeframe so be patient. Typically with couples one partner will be proactive and one partner will be a bit more laid back, that's normal
- Invest in your relationship, take time to be with each other and maybe even allocate a night out where conversations around infertility or trying to conceive are banned
- Try to incorporate some fun into your lives
- Try not jump to conclusions, take time to reflect especially when emotions are running high and try see it from the perspective of your partner. I often find sleeping on it can help, you can have fresh perspective after a good nights sleep or even a long walk to clear your head
- When you differ on opinion, try and weigh up the pros and cons, actually write them out for each scenario or decision and work through it step by step
- Focus on reducing the emotional burden rather than adding to it
- Get external support from a relationship counsellor if you feel you are not getting anywhere resolving your differences together
- And finally as my Nana use to say, try not to go to bed on an argument!