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INFERTILITY

What it Feels Like

I want to share my feelings about infertility with you, because I want you to understand my

struggle. I know that understanding infertility is difficult; there are times when it seems even I don't understand. This struggle has provoked intense and unfamiliar feelings in me and I fear that my reactions to these feelings might be misunderstood. I hope my ability to cope and your ability to understand will improve as I share my feelings with you. I want you to understand.

You may describe me this way: obsessed, moody, helpless, depressed, envious, too serious, obnoxious, aggressive, antagonistic, and cynical. These aren't very admirable traits; no wonder your understanding of my infertility is difficult. I prefer to describe me this way: confused, rushed and impatient, afraid, isolated and alone, guilty and ashamed, angry, sad and hopeless, and unsettled.

My Infertility makes me feel **confused**. I always assumed I was fertile. I've spent years avoiding pregnancy and now it seems ironic that I can't conceive. I hope this will be a brief difficulty with a simple solution such as poor timing. I feel confused about whether I want to be pregnant or whether I want to be a parent. Surely if I try harder, try longer, try better and smarter, I will have a baby.

My infertility makes me feel **rushed and impatient**. I learned of my infertility only after I'd been trying to become pregnant for some time. My life-plan suddenly is behind schedule. I waited to become a parent and now I must wait again.

I wait for medical appointments, wait for tests, wait for treatments, wait for other treatments, wait for my period not to come, wait for my partner not to be out of town, and wait for pregnancy. At best, I have only twelve opportunities each year. How old will I be when I finish having my family?

My Infertility makes me feel **afraid**. Infertility is full of unknowns, and I'm frightened because I need some definite answers. How long will this last? What if I'm never a parent? What humiliation must I endure? What pain must I suffer? Why do the drugs I take to help me, make me feel worse? Why can't my body do the things that my mind wants it to do? Why do I hurt so much? I'm afraid of my feelings, afraid of my undependable body, and afraid of my future.

My infertility makes me feel **isolated and alone**. Reminders of babies are everywhere. I must be the only one enduring this invisible curse. I stay away from others because everything makes me hurt. No one knows how horrible my pain is. Even though I'm usually a clear thinker, I find myself being lured by superstitions and promises. I think I'm losing perspective. I feel so alone and I wonder if I'll survive this.

My infertility makes me feel **guilty and ashamed**. Frequently I forget that infertility is a medical problem and should be treated as one. Infertility destroys my self-esteem and I feel like a failure.

Why am I being punished? What did I do to deserve this? Am I not worthy of a baby? Am I not a good sexual partner? Will my partner want to remain with me? Is this the end of my family lineage? Will my family be ashamed of me? It is easy to lose self-confidence and feel ashamed.

My infertility makes me feel **angry**. Everything makes me angry, and I know much of my anger is misdirected. I'm angry at my body because it has betrayed me even though I've always taken care of it. I'm angry at my partner because we can't seem to feel the same about infertility at the same time. I want and need an advocate to help me.

I'm angry at my family because they've always sheltered and protected me from terrible pain. My younger sibling is pregnant; my mother wants a family reunion to show off her grandchildren and my grandparents want to pass down family heirlooms. I'm angry at my medical caregivers because it seems that they control my future. They humiliate me, inflict pain on me, pry into my privacy, patronize me, and sometimes forget who I am. How can I impress on them how important parenting is to me?

I'm angry at my expenses; infertility treatment is extremely expensive. My financial resources may determine my family size. My insurance company isn't cooperative, and I must make so many sacrifices to pay the medical bills. I can't go to a specialist because it means more travel time, more missed work, and greater expenses. Finally, I'm angry at everyone else. Everyone has opinions about my inability to become a parent. Everyone has easy solutions. Everyone seems to know too little and say too much.

My Infertility makes me feel sad and hopeless. Infertility feels like I've lost my future, and no one knows of my sadness. I feel hopeless; infertility robs me of my energy. I've never cried so much nor so easily. I'm sad that my infertility places my marriage under so much strain. I'm sad that my infertility requires me to be so self-centered. I'm sad that I've ignored any friendships because this struggle hurts so much and demands so much energy. Friends with children prefer the company of other families with children. I'm surrounded by babies, pregnant women, playgrounds, baby showers, birth stories, kids' movies, birthday parties, and much more. I feel so sad and hopeless.

My infertility makes me feel unsettled. My life is on hold. Making decisions about my immediate and my long-term future seems impossible. I can't decide about education, career, purchasing a home, pursuing a hobby, getting a pet, vacations, business trips and houseguests. The more I struggle with my infertility, the less control I have. This struggle has no timetable; the treatments have no guarantees. The only sure things are that I need to be near my partner at fertile times and near my doctor at treatment times. Should I pursue adoption? Should I take expensive drugs? Should I pursue more specialized and costly medical intervention? It feels unsettling to have no clear, easy answers or guarantees.

Occasionally I feel my panic subside. I'm learning some helpful ways to cope; I'm now convinced I'm not crazy, and I believe I'll survive. I'm learning to listen to my body and be assertive, not aggressive, about my needs. I'm realizing that good medical care and good emotional care are not necessarily found in the same place. I'm trying to be more than an infertile person gaining enthusiasm, joyfulness, and zest for life.

This brochure was adapted from materials prepared by Jody Earle and the Educational Materials Advisory Committee of the Ferre Institute, Derwent A. Suthers, editor. The Ferre Institute is a non-profit organization dedicated to education about infertility.

Learn more about our programs by visiting the following sites:

InfertilityEducation.org

Ferre.org

FerreGenetics.org

This material was prepared by **Ferre Institute, Inc.**, a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting the health of individuals and families by providing information and education on genetics, infertility, environmental exposures, and family health history.