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INFERTILITY

How Others Can Help

You can help me. I know you care about me, and I know my infertility affects our relationship. My sadness causes you sadness; what hurts me, hurts you too. I believe we can help each other through this sadness. Individually we both seem quite powerless, but together we can be stronger. Maybe some of these hints will help us to better understand infertility.

I need you to be a listener. Talking about my struggle helps me to make decisions. Let me know you are available for me. It's difficult for me to expose my private thoughts if you are rushed or have a deadline for the end of our conversation. Please don't tell me all of the worse things that have happened to others or how easily someone else's infertility was solved. Every case is individual. Please don't just give advice; instead, guide me with your questions. Assure me that you respect my confidences, and then be certain that you deserve my trust. While listening try to maintain an open mind.

I need you to be supportive. Understand that my decisions aren't made casually. I've agonized over them. Remind me that you respect these decisions even if you disagree with them, because you know they are made carefully. Don't ask me, "Are you sure?" Repeatedly remind me that you love me no matter what. I need to hear it so badly. Let me know you understand that this is very hard work. Help me realize that I may need additional support from professional caregivers and appropriate organizations. Perhaps you can suggest resources. You might also need support for yourself, and I fear I'm unable to provide it for you. Please don't expect me to do so. Help me to keep sight of my goal.

I need you to be comfortable talking with me, and then I also will feel more comfortable. Talking about infertility sometimes feels awkward. Are you worried you might say the wrong thing? Share those feelings with me. Ask me if I want to talk. Sometimes I will want to, and sometimes I won't, but it will remind me that you care.

I need you to be sensitive. Although I may joke about infertility to help myself cope, it doesn't seem as funny when others joke about it. Please don't tease me with remarks like, "You don't seem to know how to do it." Don't trivialize my struggle by saying, "I'd be glad to give you one of my kids." It's no comfort to hear empty reassurances like, "You'll be a parent by this time next year." Don't minimize my feelings with, "You shouldn't be so unhappy." For now, don't push me into uncomfortable situations like baby showers or family reunions. I already feel sad and guilty; please don't also make me feel guilty for disappointing you.

I need you to be honest with me. Let me know that you may need time to adjust to some of my decisions. I also needed adjustment time. If there are things you don't understand, say so. Please be gentle when you guide me to be realistic about things I can't change such as my age, some medical conditions, financial resources, and employment obligations. Don't hide information about other's pregnancies from me. Although such news makes me feel very sad, it feels worse when you leave me out.

I need you to be informed. Your advice and suggestions are only frustrating to me if they aren't based on fact. Be well informed so you can educate others when they make remarks based on myths. Don't let anyone tell you that my infertility will be cured if I relax and adopt. Don't tell me this is God's will. Don't ask me to justify my need to parent. Don't criticize my course of action or my choice of physician even though I may do that myself. Reassure yourself that I am also searching for plenty of information which helps me make more knowledgeable decisions about my options.

I need you to be patient. Remember that working through infertility is a process. It takes time. There are no guarantees, no package deals, no complete kits, no one right answer, and no “quickie” choices. My needs change; my choices change. Yesterday I demanded privacy, but today I need you for strength. You have many feelings about infertility, and I do too. Please allow me to have anger, joy, sadness, and hope. Don't minimize or evaluate my feelings. Just allow me to have them, and give me time.

I need you to be strengthening by boosting my self esteem. My sense of worthlessness hampers my ability to take charge. My personal privacy has repeatedly been invaded. I've been subjected to embarrassing exams and tests. Enjoyable experiences with you such as a lunch date or a shopping trip help me feel normal.

Encourage me to maintain my sense of humor; guide me to find joys. Celebrate with me my successes, even ones as small as making it through a medical appointment without crying. Remind me that I am more than an infertile person. Help me by sharing your strength.

Eventually I will be beyond the struggle of infertility. I know my infertility will never completely go away because it will change my life. I won't be able to return to the person I was before infertility, but I also will no longer be controlled by this struggle.

I will leave the struggle behind me, and from that I will have improved my skill for empathy, patience, resilience, forgiveness, decision-making, and self-assessment.

I feel grateful that you are trying to ease my journey through this infertility struggle by giving me your understanding.

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.