

There is a common misconception that IVF is always successful. The reality is that some women may never become pregnant. IVF treatment takes time and there is no guaranteed outcome. Grief associated with treatment is very real, even though it is often hidden..

Your loved one might feel sad, angry, frustrated, out of control, vulnerable or sensitive (or all of these at the same time!) Hormone treatment can heighten these emotions.

The information in this leaflet will guide you in providing the unconditional love and support needed to help your loved one throughout this time.

Understand the rollercoaster ride

IVF has been described as a 'rollercoaster' treatment. The first part of the cycle can be full of optimism and hope, then comes a long, anxious wait after embryos are transferred followed by an enormous let-down if the cycle is unsuccessful. Like a rollercoaster, it is full of emotional highs and lows. This process is repeated each time a couple has treatment (or even tries for a pregnancy naturally).

It may be difficult for you to know what to do or say to support your loved one. Knowing what is needed at any given time is impossible. Remember how important your support is and use the following ideas to help you to help your loved one.

Ask what they need

This might change over time and they might not even know what they need. Open communication is key:

- Do they want you to raise the subject or do they prefer to initiate a discussion?
- Would they like to be distracted by other activities or would they appreciate a heart-to-heart?
- Do they want space to be alone, or do they want regular contact?
- Ask how they want to be approached. If you don't ask, you won't know.
- And remember that what they need may change over time.

Listening

The most important gift you can give:

Don't underestimate the value of listening.

True listening is not as easy as it sounds - it means not giving advice and not judging the decisions of others. It involves sitting with their pain and making them feel safe enough to say anything to you. This can be quite painful for you too - if you are really listening you may absorb some of their distress.

Be aware that you may also need to seek some support for yourself.

Think before you speak

It is not useful to say 'just go on a holiday', 'why don't you just adopt', 'I just know it's going to work this time', or 'At least you get to sleep in still'. These comments all serve to minimise and dismiss your loved one's experience.

You are better to say nothing at all than to make light of what is a very painful situation. If you realise you may have made a tactless remark, apologise and keep listening. Be honest... just tell them you don't know what to say.



Keep information confidential

Infertility is a very private matter. It is vital that you respect any confidences that your loved ones share with you. They need to trust you enough to tell you anything, without fear of you betraying their privacy.

Respect their wishes

Keep inviting your loved ones to occasions but respect their wishes if they choose not to attend. Christmas celebrations, christenings, children's birthday parties, Mother's Day and Father's Day are likely to be difficult. Support their decisions and their capacity to choose what is best for them.

Be sensitive to their feelings

Be aware that news of another's pregnancy is likely to be very painful. Carefully choose the moment when you tell your loved one. It can help to ask, in advance, how they would like you to be informed of such news. This might include when they are on their own (not in a social setting), via a written letter or through a neutral party, to give them time to react and absorb the news on their own. On the other hand, some people prefer to hear the news face-to-face.

Try not to talk excessively about your children and/or grandchildren. This can intensify their pain and sense of failure.