

Coping with the Holidays

Holidays can be stressful. For the person experiencing infertility, holidays can be the most difficult time of the year. You certainly can't make the pain of infertility disappear miraculously. But by planning in advance and acknowledging that the holidays may be uncomfortable; you can prepare yourself and improve your chances of having a pleasant holiday season. Here are some suggestions from RESOLVE (www.resolve.org).

1. Attending Holiday Parties

Be selective about accepting invitations to celebrations, especially the ones at which you know there will be a lot of children or pregnant women. Don't feel guilty about not participating in all the traditional family events. At this time, you need to concentrate on helping each other get through the holidays.

2. Visiting Family and Friends

Plan to spend time with other couples or friends who don't have children if family festivities are too much to bear this year. If you find it painful to be around children, consider arriving just in time for the holiday dinner rather than the night before. Don't rely completely on old family traditions to fulfill your present needs.

3. Celebrations

Spend time doing things you like best: preparing a spectacular meal, taking long walks, jogging, or curling up by a fire with a good novel. Plan a special trip for just the two of you. You may have to put up with comments like, "How can you be so selfish?" or "The holiday won't be the same without you." But those remarks may be easier to bear than a holiday table packed with children. Begin your own family traditions: a special ceremony or ritual that says that the two of you are already a family, and that you can rejoice in your love for each other, with or without children. Don't pretend that there's nothing wrong and carry on with "business as usual."

4. Sharing Your Feelings

Decide in advance how you will handle difficult and insensitive questions, rehearsing your answers in advance. (You may choose to be honest about why you can't join certain events which are just too painful right now.) Express your appreciation to those who have given you their love and support during the past year. Don't be caught off guard by unexpected or embarrassing questions about your plans for having a family. Plan your responses, but don't feel that you have to disclose all the details of your situation either!

5. Lending a Helping Hand

Try to help others in need. Visit an elderly or bedridden relative; volunteer at a hospital or nursing home; or participate in a holiday program to help the homeless. Cheering up other victims of the holiday blues has a rejuvenating effect. Don't close yourself off to positive feelings and new experiences. You may find that you have a special ability to make others feel good, even though you're not feeling upbeat yourself.

6. Stay Tuned-in to Each Other's Needs

Set aside time to share your feelings with each other. Allow yourself to feel sad, deprived or depressed. Infertility is a major life crisis, and you are entitled to those feelings. Your spouse may be able to help you through the rough times. Give yourself, and each other, frequent pats on the back for making it through the holidays. Remember to capture the "spirit" in each holiday which makes it special. Participate in only the activities which bring meaning to you at this time. Don't get caught up in the whirlwind of the holidays and forget about each other. You need each other's comfort more than ever. You are not alone!

Susan Trimm, Licensed Clinical Social Worker, is available by appointment at 205-982-9654. She has been affiliated with the ART Fertility Program for over 15 years. As a trained therapist who personally experienced infertility, she can help with strategies to manage the emotional challenges of infertility. Feel free to call to learn more about her services.