

What to Say (And Not to Say) to Couples Struggling With Infertility

I'm guilty a million times over. It is difficult to see anyone in pain, particularly a loved one. It might be me just wanting them to be OK. It could also be my desire to alleviate the discomfort of awkward silence. Maybe I just want to solve the problem so I can feel important. I want to say something that will make it all right. Some piece of poetic optimism that gives hope and takes the pain away.

At best, it is good intentions gone awry. At worst it is insincere, insensitive and offensive.

One of the most painful things a couple can go through is struggling to get pregnant. It seems like everyone around them is having babies. Having friends that have experienced this heartbreaking road, I know I have said the wrong things. I have learned that these are the things you should never say:

"Just relax and it will happen." First, you don't know that. Second, you are implying that it is their fault. They must be doing it wrong. You also just brushed off something sacredly painful.

"Start the adoption process, and you'll get pregnant." Again, you don't know that. Offering a pithy solution minimizes their situation. They also may not want to adopt.

"You need to have faith." Again, this makes it seem like it's their fault, except this time you are adding God to the picture. Implying that God is withholding from them because they don't have enough faith is more than bad theology. It is a subtle slap in the face by communicating that they have not yet earned God's favor.

“You should be tested for this ... “ They already know and have been. There isn’t anything that you can recommend that the medical doctors haven’t already told them.

“Which one of you is the reason?” This is ultra-sensitive and personal territory. Don’t ask. If they feel that you are close enough friends, they may tell you. If they do, be honored and walk delicately because you are on holy ground.

“You shouldn’t ... “ Don’t tell them what to do. You do not know more than they do about their situation. You’ve been thinking about it for five minutes. They think about it all the time.

Do Say:

“I’m so sorry. How are you?” An open-ended question lets them share as much as they feel comfortable. Focusing on their feelings rather than solutions makes them feel cared for.

“That’s really difficult.” This lets them know that at some level you understand. You may not have experienced the same thing, but you have had similar feelings of hopelessness and hurt.

“Thank you for telling me.” They chose to share something painful with you. Honor their decision and thank them. Let them know how much it means to you that they let you in.

“I love you.” You are with them and you care. That’s all they really want.

In what other situation would these same principles apply?

Editor’s Note: *My wife and I dealt with infertility issues for nearly four years, and it indeed was painful. We heard every one of the “don’ts” mentioned above, and they get tiresome for a couple who is struggling with this. Click [here](#) to read about our story and how we dealt with it. We now have two beautiful children, Rachel, 12, and Joshua, 10.*