



Mental Health & Fertility Care

A resource by

LAYLA

Guiding your journey to mental health



Anova Fertility
& Reproductive Health

Introduction

Embarking on the path to parenthood through fertility care is a journey filled with hope, determination, and, at times, emotional challenges. Each phase of fertility care can bring its own set of emotions. Recognizing and addressing these emotions throughout the process is crucial to maintaining emotional wellbeing. **This resource is designed to empower you with knowledge and encourage you to engage with supports that work best for your needs.** We invite you to explore the information within this resource no matter what stage you are in your journey.

Disclaimer: The content on this resource is for informational purposes only and should not be considered healthcare or medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Consult with a healthcare professional for appropriate support.

Emotional Impact of Fertility Care

Emotions that arise during fertility care are a natural response to the unique challenges experienced on the journey. **Whether you are facing the challenges as an individual or as part of a couple, it is important to acknowledge that your feelings are entirely valid.** At times, this road may feel overwhelming, but know that you are not alone as there is a community of individuals and couples who understand what you are going through. Many have found ways to cope, persevere, and thrive.

You may notice that a spectrum of different emotions can arise when going through fertility treatment ranging from happiness, relief, and excitement to more difficult ones. Some examples of difficult feelings that often come up for people going through fertility care:

- Grief and Loss
- Guilt and Blame
- Isolation and Loneliness
- Anxiety, Worry, and Doubt
- Jealousy
- Frustration
- Sadness, hopelessness



Emotions offer valuable information about how we're coping. There is a strong connection between our emotional wellbeing and our physical health. Emotional distress, left unaddressed, can lead to a variety of health issues such as poor sleep, elevated blood pressure and weakened immune function. It is not the feelings themselves (over which we have very little control) that cause these issues but our reaction or lack of reaction to them. By addressing your emotional needs, you are not only caring for your mental health but also nurturing your physical health.

Recognizing and acknowledging feelings may be very difficult but it is a crucial first step in addressing your mental health needs. Remember that even when we experience a strong emotion, it will not last forever and you do not have to act on it right away. **Take a moment to tune into your needs and be compassionate towards yourself.** Practice positive self talk, validate and normalize your experience, and ride the wave of the emotion. Also consider seeking support as needed. **Your emotions are valid and seeking support is a way to build strength, not a sign of weakness.**

Coping Strategies

Practice self-compassion

Engaging in fertility care can test your resilience, but remember that you are stronger than you may realize. To tap into your self-compassion, try asking yourself, "How would I encourage someone who is going through the same situation?", "What might a loved one say to me?" or "What do I need at this moment?"

Set realistic expectations

Recognize that treatment may involve setbacks and uncertainties. Setting realistic expectations can help you cope with disappointments and maintain a sense of hope.

Educate yourself while limiting information overload

Understanding the medical and mental aspects of fertility care can help you feel more in control. Take the time to learn about your condition and the various treatment options available. However, be cautious about limiting your exposure to credible information and be cautious around the time you spend on research! The internet can be a valuable resource, but it can also be overwhelming. Try setting healthy boundaries on the amount of time or times of day that you spend looking at information related to your fertility journey.

Maintain open communication and seek support

Keep the lines of communication open with your partner and loved ones as they can provide emotional support and be a source of strength during difficult times. Consider professional support if needed such as individual, couples, or group therapy - more about this topic on the back.



Simple Stress Reduction Exercise

The way we breathe is strongly linked to the way we feel! The rate that we breathe is a way that our body sends a message to our brain whether we are anxious (shallow and quick breathing) or calm (deep and slow breathing). By focusing on your breath throughout the day, and especially when you notice you are stressed, you can help send a message to your brain to relax and calm down. **Try practicing the following exercise at any time of day to build a moment of calm.**

1. Sit or lie down comfortably. You can close your eyes to help you focus or relax your gaze to the ground.

2. Breathe slowly and steadily in through your nose for a count of 4.

3. Hold your breath for a count of 2.

4. Breathe out slowly and steadily through your mouth for a count of 4.

5. Repeat for 5 cycles if you are comfortable. Build your breathing practice up with time to include more cycles!

Seeking Professional Support

Support can come from many different places whether they are your personal network, peer groups, or professional support. Seriously consider accessing professional mental health supports should you notice situations such as:

- Prolonged and intense emotional distress that is impairing your daily functioning
 - prolonged lack of engagement with activities of daily living such as showering, eating, sleeping
 - intense difficulty with decision making, constant feeling of overwhelm
 - past experiences with trauma or loss resurfacing and intensifying
- Difficulty coping and negative thoughts patterns regarding your treatment journey, reduced hope for the future, and/or reduced ability to keep yourself safe
- Relationship strain leading to more relationship friction or relationship breakdown

You deserve compassionate care and understanding, not only from healthcare professionals but also from yourself and your loved ones. This brochure is a starting point on your path to emotional well-being during fertility care. Remember, seeking support and education is a powerful step towards resilience and hope.