



## Becoming a Couple Again

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The struggle with infertility presents numerous challenges to couples. Regardless of how you resolve your infertility, it affects your relationship. Your infertility experiences may strengthen your bond as a couple or that bond may weaken or become fragile. Infertility changes us. We make many sacrifices in our parenting quest: personal, physical, emotional, professional and relationship sacrifices.

### Parenting

People who have children through infertility treatment or adoption have huge adjustments to make. Parenting impacts your life in so many ways, including your relationship as a couple, and that relationship may not be your top priority after a child comes. Children need constant attention and often become the center of our lives. Have you and your partner discussed your vision of parenting styles? Are there differences? Does that spill into your relationship as a couple?

When you face infertility, you do it as a team with common goals, but in parenting, there may be differences in child raising techniques and approaches. As parents, you need to make multiple daily decisions that can cause intense disagreements. Couples' communication and intimacy can suffer from sleep deprivation and the stress of being new parents.

No matter how hard it feels when struggling to adjust as new parents, remember, there are many effective ways to nurture your relationship. Good communication is imperative. Make time to talk. Whether it's a night out for a relaxed candlelight dinner or a quiet evening in, it's important to set aside time just for the two of you. Use this time to discuss things besides your child. This is a huge challenge, especially for new parents. You should use this agreed-upon time to nurture your relationship and to have fun. Try to re-establish intimacy, rekindle that flame that may be ebbing. If paying a babysitter is prohibitive and no family or friends are available, make time when your child goes to bed to do something special. A nice meal, a quiet bath, dancing or a massage can feel very special. Strengthening your relationship as a couple can strengthen your parental relationship as well.

### Childfree

Some couples' infertility journeys end without children either because they cannot have a biological child and/or choose to remain childfree. Letting go of the parenting dream involves grieving. Your dream of a future together had included children. Individuals may feel sadness, loss and anger. This can change a loving bond into a dysfunctional, quarrelsome relationship. Try to be open to working through these feelings individually and as a couple. If you cannot openly communicate, you may need to see a couple's counselor.

Your life after infertility treatment can be rich and fulfilling. Your challenge is to think about what brought meaning to your lives before infertility. Remember your courtship days. What brought you together and

what strengthened your love? What qualities in your partner helped during infertility treatment? How can these qualities bring a new depth to your current and future relationship as a couple?

Your childfree lives will include more day-to-day freedom. Your sexual relationship can be more spontaneous without infertility constraints. You may have felt the need to isolate and protect yourselves during your infertility journey. When you feel ready, spend time with people with whom you feel comfortable. Begin to break down those barriers. This may mean being away from kids—whether they be nieces and nephews or friends' children—for a while.

You may have more financial flexibility than you anticipated. This opens up opportunities to travel, take classes and indulge in art, music or hobbies. Your relationship now will be exclusively husband and wife/partners without the role of parent. Consider what your relationship as a couple means to you and create ways to help it grow stronger.

Whatever the outcome of your infertility experience, much of your future quality of life depends on the quality of your relationship with each other. Whether you are childfree or a new parent, a new life journey begins. Sometimes this involves letting go of dreams. Sometimes it means adapting to the reality of your dreams coming true. Adjusting expectations and changing goals can challenge couples. The challenge of starting a new life journey together can also be the source of future growth and renewal for you both. Good luck on your journey!