



Pregnancy Loss & Infertility's Impact on Your Marriage

By YourTango Experts

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Infertility and pregnancy loss are dreaded experiences for any adult hoping to start or expand a family. The emotional consequences can be brutal. The pain seems like it will last forever.

But what often goes unrecognized is the toll that these experiences can take on one's marriage.

In many instances, spouses grieve the loss differently, creating a sense of distance from one another. One spouse might want to talk openly about the loss, whereas the other spouse wants to avoid all reminders of it. One spouse might want to do something to commemorate the unborn child, while their partner just wants to move on.

In my forthcoming book, *Infertility, Miscarriage, and Neonatal Loss: Finding Perspective and Creating Meaning*, I outline many ways that a marriage might be affected and what to do about it.

If you are struggling with infertility or have recently experienced a loss, and you notice these sorts of differences, you might even begin to wonder whether you truly know the person you married. You might feel as if your spouse is not supporting you during this time, or that you are going through this alone. These thoughts and feelings can set the stage for marital discord.

Rather than attributing your spouse's behavior to being selfish or unsupportive, try to understand that he or she is likely just as devastated as you are, but deals with it in a different way. He's not trying to punish you. She's not intentionally invalidating your feelings.

In fact, research shows that couples who make malicious attributions for one another's behavior are more likely to divorce than couples who make benign attributions.

Before drawing all sorts of negative conclusions about your spouse, be sure to consider all of the possible explanations for his or her behavior in order to view him or her in fair, balanced manner. Like you, your spouse is hurting. And like you, your spouse is probably not at his or her best right now.

A second source of conflict for many couples who experience infertility and pregnancy loss is different views about the plan for the future. When do you stop fertility treatment? Do you use a donor egg or donor sperm? Do you move toward adoption, and if so, will you proceed with a domestic or an international adoption? Are you willing to become foster parents?

When faced with infertility and pregnancy loss, people often realize that they hold strong views about many of these issues, some of which might not have been clearly articulated until now. Trouble for the marriage occurs when one spouse wants to do everything possible to have children, but there are limits to what the other spouse is willing to agree to do. If this difference of opinion is not reconciled, the potential for resentment on the part of one or both spouses grows.

Open, honest, and balanced communication about fertility challenges is absolutely essential. I highly encourage you and your spouse to develop and commit to a shared vision about having children, about [parenting](#), and about family in general.

This shared vision can guide your decisions about big issues (e.g., whether to adopt a child), and it can also guide your everyday behavior to ensure that you are living your life consistent with your

values, the latter of which is essential for maintaining quality of life and fulfillment, no matter what your specific life circumstances.

The shared vision will reflect a sense of acceptance of your current circumstances, as well as maximizing what you do have. If you are unable to agree upon a shared vision, you may very well decide to part ways. However, in my experience, most couples in committed relationships are able to channel their relationship's strengths in order to refocus and look toward the future. To do so, it takes patience, perspective taking, and compassion.

There is no question that fertility challenges create a great deal of stress for each individual, as well as for the marriage. Be sure to take care of yourself so that you have the psychological resources to cope with this stress. From an individual standpoint, be sure that you are getting adequate [sleep](#), eating three meals a day, exercising (if you have medical clearance to do so), and ensuring that your plate is not so full that you feel scattered and behind. From a relational standpoint, savor sweet moments together with your spouse.

Go out of your way to facilitate a connection. And above all, take the time to develop a shared vision for your future, with or without children. Doing so will maximize the meaning that the two of you will make of your life together.