



EP 008: The Problem with Positive Thinking

This is the Fertile Mindset Podcast, where we explore all the emotional aspects of fertility to support you on your path to parenthood. My name is Sarah Holland. I'm the Fertile Mindset coach and a mother to two children after my own fertility challenges. I hope you find all the support and inspiration you need within this podcast, to carry you forward on your fertility journey towards your own successful outcome.

It's also my wish that through listening to these episodes, you rediscover how to enjoy life now and live it to the full while you wait for your baby.

Now let's begin today's episode.

Welcome to the second month of the Fertile Mindset Podcast! In just one month we already have so many loyal listeners. Some have told me that Thursday is now their favourite day of the week, and others said that they listen as soon as they get the notification of a new episode. This is just so lovely and exactly what I hoped when I launched this podcast – that these short episodes would bring support and inspiration to the many people who are dealing with fertility issues.

If you would like to get a notification when a new episode is live, then remember to subscribe or follow wherever you listen. And if you're enjoying the podcast then please write a review at Apple Podcasts. It's really lovely to read your reviews and they encourage others to listen in too and receive the support that they need.

So, on to today's episode: The Problem with Positive Thinking.

Now, the title may have confused you a little. You might ask "What could the problem with positive thinking be?" Of course, there is nothing wrong with a healthy positive attitude and positive thoughts, but it's the route to that positive place, and what you have to sacrifice to get there, that could be a problem.

Having a Positive Mental Attitude, often abbreviated to PMA, has been bandied about for years, and we've been conditioned to think that thoughts that are positive are automatically good, and thoughts that are negative are automatically bad. And yes, it is uncomfortable to experience emotions such as fear, worry, anger and sadness to name just a few. Also staying stuck in emotional states that are overwhelming, depleting or exhausting isn't good for you or your fertility journey. This is the whole premise of the support I offer at Fertile Mindset; to help free you of emotional states that are not supporting or serving you, so you can move on to a more healthy, supportive mindset.

You could say I'm in the business of positive thinking, so why am I now speaking out against it and saying that positivity can be problematic?

Like I said before there is nothing wrong with a supportive and positive mindset. Feeling calm, optimistic, hopeful, motivated and joyful will bring so much to your life and support you in many ways as you find your way through fertility issues. However, many of the quick fix positive thinking strategies minimise the struggles that you are facing, and can result in a false sense of positivity that will feel fake and won't last long. As soon as you're under pressure the cracks will start to show, the old negative thinking will surface again and you'll be back where you started and the only thing that will have changed is that you now have a belief that positive thinking doesn't work.

Can you relate to this in any way? Maybe you've found that trying to be positive is hard work, and even if you get there, you can't stay in a positive state for long, so you may ask "what's the point?" Your belief that fertility challenges bring stress and there's no solution is strengthened, and you may feel that there is no way out of the cycle of negative emotions.

It's a horrible place to be, I know. You want to have a baby more than anything in the world, and you may be willing to try for as long as it takes, and do whatever is needed, but the overwhelming experience of constant stress can have a devastating impact. I've talked to many, many people who at the first time we've spoken they've said they just can't go on trying for a baby as it's such a heart wrenching experience. They want to continue, but they can't find the emotional strength to keep trying.

If you're feeling this way too, or think you may be getting close to that point, you're not alone and researchers have found that it's a common place to get to for people with fertility issues.

Research studies looking at the link between stress and infertility, showed that depression and anxiety occur more frequently the further into treatment a fertility patient goes. Another study showed that the more depressed a woman is, the less likely she is to start fertility treatment or if she does start, she's more likely to stop after only one treatment cycle. Another research study found that even when people had a good prognosis (in other words, that fertility treatment is likely to result in them having a baby) and alongside that good prognosis they had the finances to pay for more treatment, the main reason that they stopped fertility treatment was due to psychological distress.

It's so heartbreaking to think that the only thing between having a baby and not could be the emotional state they are in. This is why I'm so pleased every time someone contacts me for support, and I'm so pleased that you are listening to this podcast. It's you and others like you, that know the devastating emotional impact of fertility issues, but also know that you're not going to let this beat you. You acknowledge when you're struggling, and you know that you don't want to stay in that place of struggle. You know you have more strength, resilience and resourcefulness than you're currently in touch with, and you just need a little help reconnecting with it. Well, you're in the right place and you're doing the right things.

But I don't want you to get caught up in the problematic, toxic practice of "positive thinking". I do want you to have a more positive and supportive mindset, but to make sure that it's also natural and sustainable.

So how do we do this?

Well first let's look at what we don't want to do.

If you're feeling low, and decide to shift your focus on to positive thoughts it can be like covering up a wound with a plaster before you've had chance to clean or look at it properly. If that wound is deep and serious, sticking on a happy, positive plaster isn't going to resolve the problem. It may look ok for a day or two, but soon the wound it's covering up will scream for help and it may be even more painful than before.

Now if you had an actual deep wound, I know you would take care of it before applying a plaster. You'd clean it up, use antiseptic, maybe check if it needed stitchers – and then you'd use a plaster or bandage – and one that was appropriate for the kind of wound you have.

If you wouldn't take this chance with your body, why would with your mind and your emotional health and wellbeing?

It's tempting to push uncomfortable emotions to the side, or push them down and cover them up with positive thoughts but this is rarely a good idea.

Let's look at another, less gory analogy to explain we can best take care of our emotional wellbeing.

Think of your mind like a garden that right now is overgrown with weeds. These weeds represent all the overwhelming or negative thoughts. The weeds are tangled and cover the whole surface of the ground. You want to plant some flowers to make the garden beautiful and a joy to spend time in, but if you even manage to find space to plant them, the weeds will strangle them and the flowers won't be able to fully bloom before they wither and die, letting the weeds take over once more.

Now, if you're following me so far, you'll see that the flowers represent the positive, more supportive thoughts, feelings and beliefs that you want to bring in. Imagine if your mind garden was full of beautiful flowers, full of life and potential, and it was a wonderful place to spend time. A place where you can relax, feel calm, with space to dream and be creative. Now that is the kind of mind you want to nurture to support you and your fertility.

So if right now your mind garden is full of weeds, and you want it to be a place where flowers and beautiful thoughts can grow and thrive, then there's some work to do before you even plant the first seed.

First you need to recognise, acknowledge and then resolve or release the negative thoughts. If you keep pushing them down – maybe digging those weeds back into the soil – they will still be there and will push forward at the first opportunity, overshadowing any positive thoughts you have planted.

So let's get to work, and I promise this doesn't have to be a long or painful experience.

So start by fully acknowledging the truth about how you feel at this point on your fertility journey. You may find it helpful to do this by journaling or by talking to a trusted friend, or with the guidance of a coach or therapist. If this is something you would like my support with, I offer free 30 minute consultations to anyone wanting to explore the emotional support side of their fertility journey. Send me an email at mail@fertilemindset.com if you'd like to book one in for yourself.

Now, going through this process of acknowledgement of the emotions related to your fertility challenges can be cathartic in itself. It can feel like you've freed up some space in your mind and untangled the jumbled thoughts and feelings.

Once you have got clear on exactly what you are struggling with right now and how this is impacting on you and your life, your next step is to create a plan for resolving or releasing them. Again, this might be something you feel more comfortable doing while supported by a good friend or a professional.

Whether you do this alone or with someone, what's important to consider now is the tools that you'll use to do this work. Imagine if you tried to clear a garden of tangled weeds using a pair of nail scissors. It would take a long time and it would be a painful process leaving you with back ache and blisters on your hands!

Just as you would choose the right tools for the job in your garden, the same needs to happen when taking care of your mind.

What's important here is that you look for an approach that is transformational; something that takes the challenge you are facing and helps you transform it into something more natural, healthy and supportive. At this point you do not want a Positive Mental Attitude sticking plaster!

The technique I always recommend is EFT which is also called Tapping, because it uses a simple tapping technique with your fingertips on points on the face, upper body and hands to bring about balance to the thoughts and emotions you are experiencing. Tapping doesn't work to suppress or hide these emotions; it acknowledges and works through them, gently and quickly, so that any emotional state that isn't needed in this moment can be released, making space for a naturally supportive – and yes positive – mindset to grow.

Tapping is like the bridge that will take a negative, overwhelmed mind to a much more comfortable and positive place. When you fully acknowledge and resolve whatever is triggering negative, uncomfortable emotions, the positive emotional state you get to feels natural and normal – and when you get there, you know that this is the way you are meant to feel.

If you haven't yet learnt about or used EFT, then I'd love to invite you into my Fertile Mindset Sanctuary membership, where in the free beginner level you will have immediate access to my class, Fertile Mindset Mastery – and more resources to support your mind while you're on your fertility journey. You can join for free at www.fertilemindset.com/sanctuary

Now, I want to talk about one more thing around positive thinking. Some people tell me that they're afraid to be too positive, because if what they're hoping for doesn't work out, they'll have even further to fall. I'm often told that staying in a negative, pessimistic place feels safer because they're already expecting the worst so nothing can hurt them further.

I can really understand this viewpoint, but it means that life is spent living in the negative place which I can't support, and I don't believe that is where we are meant to live. Life is for living and enjoying in the moment, even when you're waiting for your baby – or should I say especially when you're waiting for your baby. You deserve to live your life fully and joyfully, and not be living in the shadow of negative outcomes which have not yet happened and may never happen.

Being pessimistic or overly optimistic can both feel like uncomfortable places to hang out, and in our desperation not to stay in either state for too long, we can find ourselves flipping wildly from pessimistic, to optimistic and back again – an endless loop that's confusing and exhausting.

There is another place to be, another place your mind can get to which is much more neutral, rational and present – staying in the moment with the facts that are known, with a hint of natural optimism and positivity to keep momentum going towards your dreams. This is the comfortable place to be, and by using a technique like EFT you will find this place yourself quite naturally.

So let's stop the toxicity of positive thinking, and find a more natural and sustainable way to get to a mindset that truly supports you and your fertility.

Let's go over what we talked about in today's podcast:

First we talked about how positive thinking can be problematic if you're thinking of it as a quick fix strategy and as a sticking plaster to cover up the issues, minimise our emotions, and to push them to one side.

We looked at the experience of and research about the real impact of stress on fertility, and how it can be the main reason why people stop treatment too early.

Then we explored how to create a mindset that is naturally supportive and sustainable, using the garden analogy where you remove the weeds (your negative thoughts) before you plant the beautiful flowers (your positive mindset).

Lastly I talked you through a process of how to recognise, acknowledge, then resolve and release any negative thoughts or emotions, so you can connect with your most naturally supportive mindset. And remember if you would like my help with this in any way, please do get in touch with me at mail@fertilemindset.com. I'd really love to hear from you.

As we finish, I have a small favour to ask. Please share this episode with anyone you know who is dealing with fertility issues. This struggle with positive thinking is so common, and people wonder why it isn't working for them. Hopefully by listening to this episode they will know – Just as you do now – that there is nothing wrong with them or anything unusual about how they're feeling, and that there are healthy ways to get into a much more positive place. So please do share this episode with anyone you know who is trying for a baby, in any groups you're in, and on any social media you are on. Thank you so much for doing that!

Now we're in the month of February and this month I have a very special anniversary and celebration coming up. I'm going to be sharing it with you during episode 10 of the podcast, and before then I'm going to be posting about it on social media. It's something I'd love you to get involved with and I'm going to be giving away some one-to-one support sessions too, so it's all very exciting! If you want to follow me on social media to hear about it first you can do that on Facebook at Fertile Mindset and Instagram at [fertile_mindset](https://www.instagram.com/fertile_mindset). Links to both of these are on the page for this episode at www.fertilemindset.com/episode-008

So that's it for today's episode and I look forward to chatting again next time.

Thank you for listening to the Fertile Mindset Podcast.

If the topics talked about here sounded like I was speaking directly to you and your thoughts, then I would really love to invite you into the Fertile Mindset Sanctuary.

This is my fertility support membership, where you can free yourself from stress, worry and any emotions that don't feel helpful, so you can then create a naturally supportive mindset, your Fertile Mindset.

In the Sanctuary I'll guide you through using the emotional healing technique I use at Fertile Mindset called EFT, and you'll soon be feeling less stressed and more joyful.

If you're not already in the Sanctuary, do come and join us now, starting with the BUD level of membership, which is completely free of charge.

Go to www.fertilemindset.com/sanctuary to join, and then watch the welcome class, which will give you a fast start into taking back control over the emotional side of your fertility.

I look forward to seeing you there, and at the next episode of the Fertile Mindset Podcast.