



Episode 23: When friendships are changed by fertility.

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.

Hello and welcome back to another episode of the Fertile Mindset Podcast. I hope you're keeping well and finding listening to this podcast both supportive and inspiring. Since the launch on New Year's Day more and more of you are listening each week, and I'd love to continue to reach more and more people. So, could I ask you a small favour, please? Well actually that's two favours, if that's ok!

If you are enjoying the podcast, would you please write a review on Apple Podcasts. It doesn't have to be lengthy. Just a few words to share what you love about the podcast, and a 5 star rating would be amazing too! Another thing that would be super helpful is to share the Fertile Mindset Podcast with others who you think would love to listen in, by sending it to friends, posting on social media, or sharing in any fertility groups you're in. Any and all of those would be amazing and thank you so much for any reviews and shares!

So, let's start today's episode. Now, we know that having fertility issues can impact on every area of our lives. But there's one impact that's often quite unexpected and can be very hard to handle. And that is friendships. We're at a time in our life when the support of friends may be needed more than ever, but some friendships can change a lot, or maybe even disappear completely.

We were talking about this recently in my membership group, the Fertile Mindset Sanctuary, and I also asked on Instagram if anyone had experienced changes in their friendships while on their fertility journey. As more and more people contributed to the conversations, it was clear that there are many ways that friendships are impacted by fertility issues. And I know it's another thing in a long list of ways that fertility issues have changed your life, but when support is so needed at this time, it's needed more than ever, seeing our friendships change, become more distant or seem to end completely can be so heart-breaking. It's also a time when you may notice some positive changes in your friendships. It can be a time when you discover who your true friends are, who can be there for you and give you just the support you need. And there may be opportunities to discover new friends too.

Let's talk about all of this now and see if we can find some ways to deal with changing friendships that will be helpful for you.

Now, I know that even deciding to tell your friends about your fertility challenges can be a big step in itself. You may have not told anyone yet because you're nervous about their reaction, or you may have told everyone and anyone. And that was definitely me when I was facing fertility issues. I think it made it easier for me to talk about because I was already working in fertility support and in a way, it felt like an extension of talking about my work. It was my personal experience of fertility issues, but it was also teaching me so much first-hand about the reality of dealing with fertility testing, treatments, heartbreak, and loss. However, you may be somewhere in the middle. Perhaps telling a few friends, people who you trust and maybe you chose these people carefully, hoping that they would be supportive and understanding.

If there's one thing we can never predict though, it's other people's actions and reactions. And when you're feeling at your most vulnerable and you're sharing such personal information, it can be a massive blow when we don't get the support we hoped in return.

Friendships changing through fertility can take many forms. It may be that the support they come back with was insensitive and lacking in empathy. We've all had the ground breaking advice that we should just relax and that would help us conceive. Or maybe going on holiday, buying a new house, or even adopting instead would all be the magic cure to our fertility issues, because that's what they heard helped a friend so we really should try it too. Oh, it's so infuriating to get this kind of unhelpful advice I know. Other unexpected reactions from friends that I've both heard about and experienced myself, are to minimise your situation. Tell you "don't worry you're still young" or ask you to remember that you're fit and healthy and have so much else in your life. Don't let wanting to have a baby take over your life. They may compare their situation with yours in unhelpful ways too. One that I heard when I was still waiting for my first baby was that it's so much harder when you're trying to conceive a second baby because once you have a baby you know how wonderful it is and it makes it even more heart-breaking not to be able to conceive again. Yes, that was really said to me! And then if you are trying to conceive again when you already have a child, you'll be told you should be grateful for what you have. Really, all of this is so unhelpful, and it's denying you and your own experience. You may start to distance yourself from friends like this for your own wellbeing.

And at the other end of the scale, you may have had friends who had no idea what to say or do in response to your news, and you felt them take a step back from your friendship. People have described it to me as being dropped or ghosted by their friends.

Now I have three things I'd like to share with you to help with changing friendships and any feeling of loss or frustration you feel.

Firstly, please prioritise your own wellbeing. The very fact that I'm talking about this on the podcast today shows that it is a very common situation to be in. In fact, I would go so far as to say that most – if not all – people dealing with fertility issues have experienced changes in their friendships because of this. You are not alone in dealing with this, it's nothing you have done wrong, and it's understandable to feel devastated by how things have gone, with maybe some of your closest friends.

So first take care of you. And if that means creating a bit of distance, even if it's just for a short while, then so be it. You do not have to answer a million intrusive questions about your fertility, whether you're doing it right, or whether you've considered adoption. It's your business, and you get to choose if and when you share and with whom.

If you need more support to process the feeling of loss and grief you may feel around lost or changing friendships, then reach out for that support. Whether that from a trusted friend, a

fertility support group, or a fertility therapist or coach like me. I also have free resources available to you in the Fertile Mindset Sanctuary to help you work through and resolve any emotional challenge you face on your fertility journey. You can access this free support at www.fertilemindset.com/sanctuary. And if you'd like more direct support from me then feel free to send me an email to talk through my one-to-one support options. You can read about how this works on my website at www.fertilemindset.com and send me an email from there too.

Now also, meditation, journaling and doing anything that you love that gives your mind some breathing space can all be helpful too.

Then as you take care of your emotional wellbeing, there are a couple of other things you could do to support your friendship.

Ask yourself whether you can help them help you. If their response is to either bombard you with questions and unwanted advice, or to blank you completely, it's fair to say that they could do with some coaching on how to support a friend with fertility issues.

So is there a way you could guide them to giving you the support you need and know that this will help them feel good about being able to give you the right support too. It may be that you can have an honest conversation with this person, or write them a letter, explaining what you need most from them. This could even be included within the first time you tell someone about your fertility issues if you haven't told them already. Acknowledge where they are by saying "I know this might be all new to you, and I'm finding my way through it too, so I'd love you to know that I really value our friendship and the best way you can support me right now is to..." and then share what you would most like from them. Keep it simple and easy, and send the message with love to your friend.

Following on from this, another thing that can be so, so helpful is to put yourself in their place. It's said that "You can't understand someone until you've walked a mile in their shoes." And that we should withhold judging someone and their actions before we truly understand what challenges they are facing, what experience they have or lack of experience and understanding. And this can be a hard concept because we never really know where someone is coming from with what they are saying or doing. We may never know exactly what is going on in their mind or in their life, so it can be hard to "walk a mile in their shoes". What we can do though, and this can be especially easy to step into when we're talking about our friends, the people we love and value, is to acknowledge that right now that person is doing their best. They're doing what they think is right, and to the best of their ability, given their knowledge and experience. And we can send them love, unconditional love.

So, to sum up, my approach to friendships that have changed on your fertility journey is to:

1. Take care of you and your emotional wellbeing first. It is, and should always be, your top priority.
2. Take time to help your friend help you, and share with them what you need. It could be a huge relief to them to finally have something they can do to support you.
3. Imagine yourself in their shoes, living their life. Do they have the experience and knowledge to truly understand how you feel? Acknowledge that everyone is always doing the best they can, and send your friends unconditional love. Even to the friends who have drifted away and the friendships that can't seem to be saved right now.

And that's something else I wanted to talk about here is that feeling of loss, that feeling of grief. It's a feeling that is often talked about related to fertility, in many different ways, and I

think it's a valid and understandable reaction to whatever has been lost or changed on your fertility journey. Including friendships.

If you have got to the point where a friendship feels lost, allow yourself to grieve and honour that friendship and what was once maybe very different. Using EFT or tapping around any kind of grief can help smooth the path, help you process all the emotions that come up, and help you find your best way forward.

And that's the last thing I wanted to talk to you about today. The other side of friendships, related to fertility. Yes, many friendships will change, but they can change in positive ways too. It may be that your best support comes from the most unlikely places and people. You may have a friend who doesn't have any experience of fertility issues, but is so empathic that they seem to know exactly the right thing to say and do at the right time. I had a few friends like this when I was trying to conceive, and although that's many years ago now I have such clear memories of them each being with me at some of my lowest moments and either giving me space to talk and be heard, or giving me a hug and a place to feel safe with all the emotions I was feeling. I feel goosebumps now as I remember those moments, and as I think about those friends now, I know I've supported them through their challenges in life too. Often ones I had no personal experience of but that wasn't important – it was the friendships that mattered. We often don't need more advice, information, or guidance. We just need to feel supported, held and heard. And if you have friends in your life like this, keep them close, and tell them how much you appreciate them.

It's likely that you do have people in your life right now that can give you the support you need, you may just not have thought to ask. As I said before support can come from the most unlikely places.

You may also be more directed in how you find your best fertility support friends. And the best places to find new friends who truly understand how you feel are fertility groups of any kind. Whether they are in person fertility support groups, online groups, Facebook groups, or fertility support memberships like my Fertile Mindset Sanctuary. There are many, many people who would love to be in your support network and be your fertility friend. I made a group of friends from an online forum when I started to try for my first baby around 17 years ago. And we're still in touch to this day.

I saw a quote today on an Instagram account called Other Perspectives just before I recorded this podcast, and that was "You can't CHANGE the people around you, but you can change the PEOPLE around you." So, I thought I'd finish by sharing that with you.

Thank you for listening today, and I hope you've found this episode useful. I know this journey can feel lonely at times, but the truth is you're not alone with what you're experiencing. There are many people who understand, who empathise, myself included, and my wish for you is that you have some of these special people in your life – whether they are people you already know or who you are yet to meet.

Sending you lots of love and I look forward to speaking with you again next week on the Fertile Mindset Podcast.

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.