



EP 027: Are fertility support groups right for me?

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 the Fertile Mindset Podcast. I hope you are well and I'm so pleased that you've joined me here to talk about this topic of fertility support groups. It's so important to have support, and support that really works for us, and I hope you find this episode useful.

Now, the very fact that you are listening to this podcast, which acknowledges and supports the emotional aspects of fertility, I'm guessing that you may have attended, or at least thought about attending a fertility support group at some point. Or maybe the idea fills you with dread. Even though it could be helpful to be with people who truly understand your situation and empathise with the struggles of fertility issues, maybe there's something about being in a room full of people you don't know that makes you shy away from fertility support groups.

What do you think about when you hear "fertility support group"? And how does it make you feel? Do you imagine rows of seats, or maybe a big circle, with everyone taking their turn to stand up and say "My name is Sarah and I have fertility issues"? If so, I can understand why the idea of attending a support group could feel daunting.

And that's the traditional format of support groups, and it's a type that I have facilitated and attended myself, without actually having to stand up and name my problem though! But there are many many ways that a fertility support group can happen, many forms it can take, and also many ways they can help you, as well as a few things to look out for to make it a positive experience for you. I'm going to talk about all of this in today's episode.

We are at a time in the world now with massive advances in technology and of course, the need to find other ways to meet up after Covid 19, where there are more options than ever to find and connect with support on your fertility journey. I'm going to talk about those now, including the various fertility support groups that I currently facilitate or have been a part of, and how to find the best support group for you.

So, let's think first of that more traditional support group setting. And as the world starts to open up it may be that you're craving a meet up in person and to be in the company of other people. It can be incredibly comforting and energising too, to spend time with people who you can really relate to you, and to give and receive support in this setting. You may be able to find support groups locally organised by fertility organisations such as Fertility Network UK. They have listings of groups at fertilitynetworkuk.org. Or there may be one linked to your fertility clinic. Some groups are also set up by individuals and fertility practitioners, therapists and nutritionists. I used to run a local group in Hertfordshire myself, and before lockdown I attended some other groups in person in Hertfordshire and London as a guest speaker. As well as their usual support group time where they can share their updates, and give and receive support, I would give a short talk about using EFT and demonstrate how it works with a group tapping session to reduce stress. In person support groups can be very special sessions, and it can be a way to meet local friends too, when you may struggle to find people among your friendship circle who understand, you can find new friends through fertility support groups.

Now this applies to online groups too. I've mentioned before that before Facebook and Instagram, we would connect online through forums or message boards, and I met an amazing group of friends on one of these who supported me through my fertility journey. We started as online friends, and we're located all over the place including in several countries, but over time we have all met each other in person at one time or another. So online connections and friendships can be just as real and meaningful and shouldn't ever be underestimated.

The availability of online support groups has increased massively over the last year when the pandemic made this a necessity. It seems like everyone has become an expert in using Zoom or Microsoft Teams, and taking support groups online has really opened them up, literally to the whole world! At the start of the pandemic I was invited to speak with a support group in Wales, and I only needed to travel as far as my home office upstairs!

I have always loved facilitating online support groups, and although many are switching to online because of lockdowns and social distancing, there are many many benefits of meeting online too. Many people find online support groups less daunting. They can choose whether or not to have their camera on, whether to speak, and are accessing this support from the familiar setting of their own home. There's no need to travel, to worry about traffic, directions or finding parking. Online support groups are accessible to anyone with a computer or phone with an internet connection. It opens up the type of support you can access too. You're not limited to whatever offering is available locally; you can access specialist support for whatever you need on your fertility journey, whether that is connecting with people with a certain kind of fertility diagnosis such as PCOS or endometriosis. You can access groups that are for people having donor treatment, or pursuing parenthood as a single person. You could find groups that are focused on wellbeing, nutrition, the emotional side of fertility and mindset. And this is where my real passion is. I love bringing people together who have a shared vision of what they want for themselves on their fertility journey, who are recognising the stress of fertility issues and want to proactively take care of their emotional wellbeing. I have held support groups in many formats, and for the last few years I have been facilitating groups within membership, the Fertile Mindset Sanctuary. The Sanctuary has many different elements of support within it, and is centred around a private Facebook group that is just for Sanctuary members. The group is open all day every day, and is a place where people can freely give and receive support, as well as asking for my input and support too. I go live in the group once a week on Tapping Tuesday, where I share a guided round of EFT tapping on a key emotional challenges that have been requested by the group. These are lovely opportunities every week to come together for a mini support session, and twice a month I hold Support Circles in the Sanctuary, which are our hour-long support groups, with the added dimension of support of using EFT to work through and transform negative thoughts and emotions. I love these Support Circle twice a month because there is no agenda or topic set. We always start with a short meditation to become

present for the session, and then I hand over to the group to ask for what they need support with. They share their current challenges, the rest of the group are invited to contribute and support, and then we tap through the issue together. And if you know EFT already, you'll know that once we have acknowledged and connected with the emotion, the next step is to use EFT which is using our fingertips to tap on key meridian points on the face, upper body and hands to bring about balance to our thoughts and emotions. These groups are so special because the members hold the space for each other and allow themselves to step into a vulnerable place as they share what they are struggling with. And then they get to take part in the tapping and support each other, and then witness the clarity and breakthroughs that happen. And it's inspiring to see that! It's comforting and affirming to just be with people who really get how you feel and what you're dealing with on your fertility journey, but when we take the support to the next level and do the work together to transform the most uncomfortable feelings into something strong and supportive, it's amazing. It is inspiring, motivating and gives hope. If you can be with someone as they share what they are struggling with and then be a part of their healing and transformation, you can't not be changed by that yourself. In the Sanctuary I see the members lift each other up, believe in each other and themselves, and always want more – more stress-free moments on their fertility journey, a calmer clearer mind, and a happier and more joyful life as they wait for their baby.

As you can probably tell by now, the Fertile Mindset Sanctuary is a pretty special and unique kind of fertility support group. It's a private group that's only for subscription members of the Sanctuary, and whilst we're not open to new members right now, we will be after the summer – around September time. If you'd like to be on the waiting list to join us, the best way to do this is to join the free level of Sanctuary membership now. This will mean you can take a step into emotional wellbeing and self-care with resources to teach and guide you through using EFT for you and your fertility, and a weekly email from me every Tuesday with a useful tip to get the most out of your EFT practice. You can get your free Sanctuary membership at <http://www.fertilemindset.com/sanctuary> and then I promise that you will be the first to know when we open the subscription membership to new members later this year. We only do this a few times a year because I like to welcome in new members together in a group and in the best possible way. We even have a lovely welcome party! So in the meanwhile do join us on the free level of support in the Sanctuary, and there's another support group I facilitate that I'd love to invite you to as well.

You may have heard of the relatively new Clubhouse app, which is available on both iPhone and Android now. You download the app for free from your app store, and then register on the app. At the point of recording this podcast, you needed an invitation to join Clubhouse. Now, if this is still the case when you join and you need an invite, I usually have a few I can pass on, so email me at <mailto:mail@fertilemindset.com> or send me on DM on Instagram at [fertile_mindset](#).

Once you're registered for Clubhouse and your inside the Clubhouse app you can then choose to enter rooms, where audio only live chats are taking place. There are Clubhouse rooms on just about every topic you can imagine, and you'll have a great time browsing and discovering new rooms. Once you enter a room you can choose to stay in the audience to listen and you are always on mute. Or you can raise your hand to speak to join the conversation or ask a question to whoever is hosting the room.

And you're probably wondering why I'm going into so much detail to share how Clubhouse works, and this is because every Thursday – so that's today if you're listening to this podcast on its release day – every Thursday I host a fertility room on Clubhouse called Your Fertility Support Team. This week I am hosting the room alongside up to 16 of my fertility colleagues who between them have a huge range of fertility experience and expertise. Last week was our very first room together and it was so lovely to see this live room in action, where we had an audience listening and learning, including some who raised their hands to ask questions about their own fertility situation. We had questions asked and answered about many topics

including recurrent pregnancy loss, thyroid issues and PCOS. If you would like to join us on Clubhouse for our live rooms you are very welcome. Remember it is audio only, no one is on camera and you can stay muted in the audience if you wish or ask questions too. These live conversation rooms are a wonderful way to instantly connect with support, and be alongside others who really understand the experience of fertility issues. So that's today, Thursday at 7pm UK time and every Thursday at the same time. 7pm UK time is 11am Pacific and 2pm Eastern time, currently. So download the Clubhouse app, register your name, and then get in touch if you need an invitation to join Clubhouse – either email me at <mailto:mail@fertilemindset.com> or message me on Instagram at [fertile_mindset](#).

Now, we've talked about the different types of fertility support groups, where to find them, and how to join the ones I host. I want to talk about how you can get the most out of them now, and how to make sure you have a positive experience with support groups.

I would encourage you to approach the idea of joining any kind of support group with curiosity. You may not be able to imagine if or how a support group would help you, or you may feel nervous about joining one, but if you approach it with a curious mind then you do so without any set expectations. If you already know EFT – or you're learning it now with the free resources in the Sanctuary – then you can tap on our feelings or fears about joining a group. Use words as you tap such as "I wonder what this group will be like. I'm feeling nervous about joining, but also curious too".

Then once you decide which group you are going to attend and when, prepare yourself for the session by deciding that you will take what you need and leave what you don't. Part of the magic of support groups is the opportunity to be with other people who have similar experiences to you. You feel validated and heard for the first time maybe, by hearing them share their stories and you yours. But with this there is a possibility of overwhelm too. If you are at a point on your fertility journey where you are researching solutions and seeking answers, it may be that hearing about other's approaches to their fertility and all the tests, diagnoses and treatments they've had could feel confusing. So remember to take what you need, what resonates with you, and leave behind what you don't.

Imagine you're at a buffet and there are 100 different dishes available. You have one plate and an appetite for only one meal. Do you try and sample all 100 dishes? If you did your plate would be overflowing and you'd feel overwhelmed and quite sick if you tried to eat it all! So why is your fertility research any different? Point your compass towards the direction you are heading, and then whenever you are around sources of information you can take notice of and gather what you need, and leave behind anything and everything that doesn't feel relevant right now.

Another suggestion I have is to give yourself time and space when you attend a support group. Don't squeeze into a space in your calendar between other things you need to show up for. If you can give yourself time before to centre yourself, clear your mind and prepare for the session, that's amazing. And equally, if you can give yourself some time after to process, reflect and take a breather before jumping back into your busy life then that's going to be helpful too.

You might also find it useful to have a notepad and pen with you. You never know when some information or ideas will be shared that you want to note down, or some insights and thoughts that come to you that you want to record and reflect on later. The last one especially happens during the Sanctuary Support Circle sessions as we share and tap together, it's quite common for new thoughts and perspectives to emerge when you've cleared the heavy emotions.

So I hope this podcast today has inspired you to look into or to continue to connect with support groups. Whenever you choose to connect with something new on your fertility journey and in your life, you never know where it is going to take you. Who you will meet,

what will come out of those connections, and how it could be a catalyst to new and positive change for you and your fertility.

I know that many people feel there is a real gap in their lives as far as support and understanding of their fertility goes. A support group and the people you meet there could fill that gap, so be curious, take a chance and see how connecting with a group could help you.

Thank you for joining me today, and I look forward to speaking to you again next week – and before then if you're in my Sanctuary group, or in the Clubhouse room too!

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.