



EP 032: How to anchor and self-soothe when TTC, with Helen Davenport-Peace

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. Today I'm sharing a beautiful conversation that I had with Helen Davenport-Peace from at The Fold. You are going to love Helen. She's a yoga teacher with her own lived experience of fertility issues, and brings a very caring and very gentle approach to fertility, that really takes the whole person, the life you're living into account. At one point in this conversation she says that she believes in living well, and that's what I love about Helen's support – she's focused on each person receiving the support that they need to live their life well while they wait for their babies. There are some practical ideas and tips in this conversation too, lots that you can take away and incorporate into your life. And if you are a subscription member of the Fertile Mindset Sanctuary, Helen will be joining us for a live chat. Check your email for the date and time. Now I hope you enjoy listening to our conversation!

Sarah: So hello Helen, welcome. Lovely, lovely to have you on the podcast.

Helen: Oh, hi Sarah. Thank you so much for having me. What a privilege.

Sarah: Well, it's been a little while, hasn't it? We've been chatting about this and had some really, really good conversations. And I just felt like I wanted to share our conversations with more people because we've been talking about interesting stuff related to fertility and perhaps things that people don't always talk about so much. but really important conversations to have. So I can't wait to get stuck into this with you.

Helen: Oh, thank you. Yeah, it's, we've had some great chats, haven't we? And I said to you right back at the beginning, that it feels like a really long time ago now. Way before social media and fertility, kind of, were coming together. About 10 years ago I think I was listening to you on a podcast. I think it must have been. So you were an integral part of my journey. So it just feels really lucky to be here now, speaking with you.

Sarah: And I remember that was so lovely to hear, cause I think I'd spotted you on Instagram first and, and really intrigued by some of your stories and the topics you were talking about,

which we'll get into. But yeah, then when we got in contact, and you already knew me, and you'd been using EFT. That was, it was just amazing. I love it, how we just circle back to each other, and we all end up meeting again. Yeah. So, let's get into what we're going to talk about then. So tell us first a bit about yourself and, and what it is that you do, and you bring to the whole fertility experience, for people.

Helen: Okay, well, so my name is Helen Davenport-Peace. Peace being my married name, so it is real, because I know as a Yoga teacher, I think people from countries think it's not real.

Sarah: It's a beautiful name, very lucky. Beautiful.

Helen: And I have recently built a studio in my garden. So I'm a yoga teacher specializing in fertility yoga. And it, the space that I've built, The Fold, I really want this to be a hub for people that are trying to conceive and, in that community, to be able to come to, online or in person, and meet other people whilst, like, doing things that really nurture themselves. So that's my vision for this space, and that was born out of my own experience. So I. It took me five years to have my son, three rounds of IVF treatment and all of the things that happen to people in between that. So I always say that to sound such a potted version of what happened, but there's a loss of many, many chapters to that story.

I always knew that I wanted to do something. However, my. I'd say, I know how my story kind of ended really. But I knew that, however my story ended, I wanted to do something with that community because I had felt so isolated during my experience. And everybody goes through their experience in individual ways, but for me, I was really seeking community and that was very, very hard to come by. So I made some friends on an online forum, Mumsnet actually, and they were my lifeline and I thought everybody deserves to be able to have a lifeline of people. So I knew I wanted to do that. But then the other thing that I had really, really struggled with through infertility, and through other areas of my life really, was anxiety and the anxiety of waiting, of surgery, of treatment, had quite an impact on me physically, and my physical health and mental wellbeing and I wanted to be able to support people with that because I found things that did help me, and support me, EFT with you being one of them.

But I've always been a Yogi, so yoga. I've done yoga since I was 18. So yeah, I did my teacher training five years ago now I think. And I'm a teacher by trade, so I'm a university lecturer. I was a primary teacher in my twenties, so it felt like a natural progression for me to take my teaching into a different landscape and I have recently just finished my lecturing career to do this full-time cause it's just, the passion is there. And the work that I've done over the last few years has meant such a lot to me. So that's kind of where I'm at. You find me at the very beginning of doing this Full-time.

Sarah: Yeah, a very big step, but a really exciting step and I'm so pleased on behalf of everyone in the fertility community that you've taken that brave step because already the offerings that you have at The Fold are beautiful. And I think everything you've just talked about there, community, nurturing, understanding all the many layers and facets of a fertility journey, you know, and how it really does impact on us. You are already providing such a great deal of support. So I'm really excited now, your full-time focus is this, you know, what else is going to come next? So, what a lovely intro. And understanding of how you approach fertility, which may well be quite different from, perhaps the standard approach of looking at the physical body and balancing hormones and, you know, taking medication and whatever else is being done on a physical level, but I always get the feeling Helen that, yeah, much like me as well, you know, you're really concerned with the experience and the life that is lived through this fertility journey.

Helen: Yeah. So true. It's about living well, isn't it? Living well through it in a physical way, in a mental way. It's so hard. So I very much kind of, I put myself in a slightly different box to a

lot of fertility yoga offerings. I'm not ever going to come out and say, this is going to increase your chances of pregnancy by 25%, or have it as an out. I don't focus on the outcome. And there are lots of wonderful places people can go for nutritional information and all the things like positive changes that they want to make. But I think for me, you have to live with making those changes for so many years, and trying so hard to do all the things.

I saw you did a Real recently, of making a list of all the things that you're doing to try and support yourself. I think my main aim is to come back to the body, and to come back to you, and regulating the nervous system, even if that's just for the hour that we might be together in a session. But trying to get some, looking at some of the micro tools that we can use really, when we are in that state of, I think in fertility it can put us in that real state of fight or flight, because there's so many things happen along the way.

Whether that's when you're just starting out and you're waiting, you know, see if your period comes or not. And then whether you're waiting to think, whether you might go to the GP, there's so much waiting and tension, that I think we start to accrue in our bodies. So I think my work is a little bit about trying to look at where we might have blown ourselves a bit off course in terms of looking after us. It's a bit of a homecoming really, coming back home to ourselves, and finding the things that can help us when things are really tough. So I think that's my specialism, I think.

Sarah: And you mentioned the word nurture quite early on as well, and yeah, I don't think always a lot of time is made for that, or even, we know how to nurture ourselves or we go down kind of the typical routes of self-care thinking does that mean having, you know, a bubble bath and a massage? What does it mean to nurture and really practice this good self-care and at the times we need it. And sometimes we don't have the energy for it, or even the focus and the energy and the ability to, yeah. know what to do when we are struggling.

Helen: Well, I think I can only speak about my journey and maybe it will resonate with anyone listening, but I was looking for the fix. So what started off in the early days of supplementation and then looking at diet and pineapple juice and all of the things, and then kind of, it was like a progression. It went into holistic therapies and then acupuncture and reflexology and exercise. And by the end, by like year four, it becomes, so I'd become quite rigid, I think, in looking for what's going to be the next thing that I could try, you know, is it going to be homeopathy? I think if someone had said go and swim in the sacred lake in Australia and I could've afforded to go, I would've gone and swim in the lake because I was looking for the fix. And I think that is perfectly understandable and, you know, deeply. I've got deep sympathy, with me of then, to be so striving.

Sarah: Well I sat on a fertility chair in some kind of cellar space, in St Emilion in France, and it, because this chair was supposed to be the fertility chair. So yeah, we do those things.

Helen: It matters, you know, it's like, what could I, if I keep putting things in the bucket, then surely sooner or later it's going to be the thing. But I think actually what I got completely lost, I completely lost myself. And so then, for me, what started happening was it manifested itself quite physically, as anxiety is prone to do. So I had a lot of digestive issues going on, my eczema had become quite bad. I got a lot of fatigue; it was also just palpitations. Quite full-on physical symptoms because I just, I don't think that I was. I was in quite a yang energy. So I was doing a lot of running because I felt like I wanted to be, you know, peak fitness. I was doing a lot of hot yoga because that kind of helped with my, I don't know. I just got myself into that kind of a student mindset, really and if I do enough and I try hard enough, I'm going to crack this because in most bits of my life, if I'd done that, I could get results, and I felt so out of control. But I think I had to pair it right back and just stop. To stop, and EFT kind of found me around that point. So you were kind of a part of that, and I changed some of the yoga practices that I was doing.

But I think really, and the more work that I've done, and the more trainings that I've done, and the more, you know, things that I have been involved with over the past five, six years, I got, I feel like, I wish that I could put my mind, my brain, into me, you know, 10 years ago and say like, you might just need to take a breath, hand on the heart, to really slow down. And I hadn't done enough of that.

And I think a lot of people come to me actually, really not in that place. They are at such a fast pace, trying to get where they want to be, that they are in that state of anxiety and it's about just being tender. Yeah. Tender, nurturing, restorative, looking after you in really little ways and finding which ways work and different things work for different people as I know you and me have spoken about.

Sarah: Yeah, there is that temptation to just keep doing stuff and actually feeling like you're getting somewhere, you know, believing that you're getting somewhere. But I think it is at that point, and maybe it's the point that you say when you found the EFT, and it's the point that lots of people come to me. It's that actually this feels too much and what I've done that I thought would support myself has actually caused even more stress, and I feel like I'm perhaps in a worse place physically and emotionally than I was before, and we come back to that. Yeah. What do I really need then? Strip it right back to the real nurturing.

And I know we said that we want to talk about things that were easy to implement, you know, that wouldn't be big, big self-care things to do, you know, but that actually can be smaller actions and smaller tools that we use. So, yeah. I'd love to hear.

Helen: I feel really passionate about that. And I think the reason that I do is because sometimes along the way of trying to conceive there are points in time that are almost unbearable, aren't they, you know? You're waiting for that embryologist call, you are waiting to do a pregnancy test, after IVF that's cost thousands of pounds. It's almost an ongoing up the wall, unbearableness, I think. And I think then when people might say, well it'd be really good for you to do a guided meditation. It's like, I can't even do that. I can't do a yoga class. I feel, actually, a little bit paralyzed, and anxiety. Then what might we do? Because it's our, it's our nervous system isn't it going into that? And then am I going to fight, am I going to fight? It's the adrenaline, and how could we maybe take a step backwards into that state of rest and digest? And it can be really micro things and different things will work for different people. So I could talk through some ideas if that might be helpful to people?

Sarah: Yeah. I'd love that personally as well, because I think we all need this wherever we are in our life.

Helen: I think of it as kind of, I'm in a compass. So I run a six-week course called North star. Which is all focused about our inner compass. And I like that metaphor of finding your North star of like, what is the thing, actually, that is the thing that suits and grounds me vertically quickly. It doesn't take very much time and it might just bring me into a point where I might then be able to access something that is soothing, even if that is watching, you know, a funny program, you know, but sometimes we can't do anything, we're just stuck.

So for me, I think, I think of it through the senses. And we all learn in different ways and, and in a similar way to being different learners. I think we soothe in different ways as well. And I don't think we always know what soothes us and it can be really self-soothing is a really huge topic. And I know we haven't got loads of time to go into it now, but I think sense is a good way of thinking about it so we could think about touch. So it might be just very simply placing a hand on the heart and just noticing what is happening for you at that moment? So, what am I feeling?

And you don't have to attach to words that you think sometimes people will say, how are you? You know, I'm going to tune in to how I'm feeling, and you can just sit there and think, I

don't really know. It doesn't have to have a word. It can just be a kind of listening to you and that self-contact of a hand on the heart or the belly, or even the lower back, back of the neck. Maybe a little bit of a Jaw massage. It's just. It's making contact with yourself as if you were nurturing another person, and it can be very, very steadying.

So I know a lot of people that, a lot of my people that come to me, and hand on the heart, it's been a very useful tool for them. Think of them as like little anchors. So we're on our little boat and it's been really rocked around and we kind of find these little anchors that might be able to anchor us.

So we've got touch, and with touch it might just be that actual sensory contact. So it might be, you know, maybe you just need to get into bed with clean sheets and you're just kind of, you can be soothed, and that's just enough for that time. The master anchor, I tend to think of as the breath. So we might just find a breath technique that works for us. We might just notice the breath. So you don't have to do any counting or anything complicated. I think the word breath work in itself can sound quite inaccessible sometimes, and what is it? It's a bit mysterious.

But just noticing. We go all day, quite often, without noticing our breath and it might just be that you take one deep inhale and one deep exhale, and you just notice the breath and notice those microstate changes that just tuning into our breath can make.

There are soothing breath techniques that you can use. So you might breathe in for three, breathe out for five, different combinations of counts, and people like even numbers. So a nice conscious breath in of five and out for five. That can be, just simple. It doesn't need to be anything complex or, you know, sitting for half an hour doing breathwork. It could just be really, really small, these little, tiny tools, and then coming back to that, kind of, sensing. It may be that you have a smell. So it might be that you have a particular perfume or candle or essential or something that you can start to anchor into feeling quite calm, that you can practice with. So if you're doing something, if you just, you know, you're just doing a little bit of breath and hand on the heart, then you might integrate a smell, so you can kind of have it as an anchoring aroma. That can be, that can be helpful then, so then if you're going into another stressful situation, you could take something that smells like that, and it could be whatever that works for you. And it's about building those kinds of, yeah, like aromatic anchoring. It can be very helpful.

And similarly, with music. So it may be that you put together some music that is very, very soothing for you and you, you might listen to some, some. Have a playlist. I think our brain, we kind of get that muscle memory of things that can bring us into a calmer place and then if we can start to layer those things together, then that can be quite helpful.

I've worked with people a lot with injections and injection anxiety, and I think having that kind of layering. Okay, I'm gonna have a hand on my heart, I'm going to have a really lovely song that I know is kind of soothing to me, that you listen to when you're not feeling anxious or that you smell those lovely things and you think about, I don't know, maybe you smell the lovely candle you've got in your room, and you light that candle.

They're just tiny little things. Just the act of lighting a candle and sitting quite quietly. They don't have to be, you know, you don't have to go and do an hour of yoga practice. That might just be what you need in that moment. So they're the kind of things that I talk about. This, those small, small actions. And I've got loads of those, and I think some of them will probably overlap with things that you do, Sarah, like mantra and the power of having a little affirmation that can be really like, I am safe, hand on heart, and then you mix it with a mantra.

So it's almost like you've got a little, yeah, like a little buffet. You kind of choose the little bits at work for you. Like I did that breath. And I've got, I've got someone that works with me that

doesn't like, counted breath. That's great. You don't have to do it. You might just breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth, or you might, you know, find the thing that works for you. And it's about kind of tuning into ourselves, again, finding our frequency rather than looking at some of the external things. I think it's actually coming home to you.

Sarah: Yeah.Yeah. Because when we constantly look outside of ourselves, we start to feel scattered and disconnected and you know, it's very hard to function. Very hard to think clearly and, and know yourself, and make decisions, and all sorts of things.

Those were so simple, and so beautiful that I did each of them as you were talking about them. So just to demonstrate, I just thought this is so easy. I can do it now while I'm listening to you, you know, I can hold my hand on my heart, I can take those breaths, and I had a little oil blend that a friend gave me actually, with the theme of Pause. So that felt just really appropriate that she'd made me this oil blend. So I suppose a little bit of that in my palms as well. The only bit I didn't do was the music, because well, that wouldn't be appropriate right now.

Helen: (...) Your talisman. And these are the things that I do. I have like a worry stone, and you can buy like little worry pebbles. If I'm, I mean, I've got ongoing, at the moment I've got ongoing issues with skin cancer. There's a whole other story we could talk about. So I still need these tools myself. I have a worry stone that I have in my pocket, and I'm in the waiting room feeling. If I'm feeling anxious, I can start to call on some of those tools, and I can look around, place myself in the room, look at the things that I can see, think about the things that I can hear. I might integrate the breaths, might rub my stone, might have my smell. And that these little things keep us from going into, kind of, a free state where we can become a bit dissociated or a bit lost, you know, scattered. It's exactly what you say. And we're not. It can just be kind of the grounding tools.

I mean, outside, you can go stand on the grass in bare feet, disliked that earthing, so simple, such an easy thing to do in the morning, or if you're out and about in a park, if you don't have a garden, just take your shoes off, touch the earth. I think that's such a small thing. Look at the clouds, and the impermanence of them. And they're the things that I think sometimes we just, we seem so small that we, we don't, we, you know, we don't integrate them in a way that maybe that's all we need, and if you know, maybe that is your yoga for the day, is it you stood on the grass and looked at the clouds, sometimes that's, you know, those little things are as powerful as the bigger gestures I think.

Sarah: Yeah, the simplicity of life isn't it. I think we've become so wrapped up in what we can do with technology and amazing things that we can do. You know, we forget the simple things and what strikes me, listening to you as well, and imagining everyone that comes together with the events that you create, and the gatherings that you have, is how this is kind of, an opportunity on a fertility journey, that we didn't expect, you know. Very few people go into this journey knowing that they're going to have problems with their fertility, but then they're on this longer journey and they start to discover more, about themselves, and the ways they can operate the good for them, and that don't work for them. And the ones, you know, that really resonate like we're talking about here.

And once you've had that opportunity to step into a new way of doing something and these tiny little things as well, they're not, you know, it's not major things, but it's new habits. Isn't it? And new learnings about what works for you and what doesn't, it's learnings for life Isn't it? It's not just for this trying to conceive part of the journey because I know that's something you're very passionate about, isn't it? It's recognising the whole journey.

Helen: It's, I think for me, I kind of, you can put it in a box can't you, and think well, that's, I was anxious because of that. But I think the, so many things come up beyond, beyond trying to conceive. Outside of trying to conceive. I mean look at the context that we're living in right

now. I think they can. Having that toolkit can serve you in so many different places, and so many different things that happen. And I think the thing that I really, kind of, want to just reiterate is that we all need different things, you know. So for some people it might be that you go out for that run because that's what you need and that is what suits you. So I think we're all, we're all different and we all need different things. But it's about giving yourself permission to find the things that work for you and not worry that something that works for somebody else doesn't work for you. I mean, you mentioned technology, and I know that something we've discussed is that zoom has been really powerful for me to notice, with the classes that I've run, that on Zoom, where everybody's at home, they really can craft their experience in a, in a yoga session, exactly how they want, you know.

If you want to turn your screen off and just lie down, which may be what you need on that day, or have a cup of tea and listen to the guided meditation, or choose which movements you want to do. I think Zoom sessions have allowed people to really feel safe to be able to do what's right for them, which with fertility, you know, particularly when people are going through treatment, is so important, that those sessions are differentiated.

So when you work with a fertility person, like on a journey, one-to-one, for yoga, and they're coming to fertility yoga just for them, then you can really blend the sad point in their cycle that they're at. But you can't do that in a group, so you have to really differentiate. And that's why it's really important for me to know who's coming to my classes and to give. And in the instances when I've worked. And in spaces where I haven't, it's really about giving people that permission to listen to your body and do what you want to do.

And I think my big mission there, is to really work out how I can do that in in-person spaces in the studio as well. So, you know, maybe we do have five women together and they're all doing slightly different things. I think that that's my, will make me so happy, that we are just doing what feels right for us, on any given moment, and not worrying about what we should be doing or what other people are doing.

Sarah: It's such an important lesson to learn, that it is okay, and it's needed. That we do it our own way at all times, you know, and, and trust our own intuition and, and do what feels right and leave behind what doesn't, you know, and I often say that to people with anything I'm delivering. It's like, you don't have to go along with all of this, just take them, you know, what works for you, pick and choose and leave behind the stuff that doesn't. And yeah, if you can facilitate that in an in-person group and women see other women doing that, you know, it's, it's quite magical, isn't it? Cause they can all lift each other up and say, actually, you know, we can do this our own way.

Helen: And I think it's, yeah, I think my big ethos is to be trauma informed and recognise that people will need different things, and really honouring that, that everybody brings their own experiences into a group and it's about being, feeling safe and feeling that you are, you have landed somewhere where you are heard, where you're understood and where you can take things at the pace that you need to take them. So it's always a work in progress and, you know, we don't always get it right. But that's what I'm striving to do.

This experience. That's what. That's what people need. They just need to feel seen and heard and know that they're going to be looked after.

Sarah: Lovely. And I can tell what the way you're talking about this Helen, is that you create very safe and nurturing spaces for that, those discoveries to happen, you know, and I'm excited that you're now combining the online with the in-person and perhaps the pandemic has, you know, facilitated that in ways that we didn't think it would.

So, what's. I know you're still a work in progress right now and you're using the summer to get clear but what can we expect,

Helen: Yeah, it's a liminal time. Isn't it? Of knowing how things are going to unravel and what's appropriate and what isn't, and my space is only small. So I'm going to do a few things over summer, a couple of in-person things over the summer. I've got a session that I run monthly called the heart space, which is online. So, because I've met so many wonderful people across the world that have been coming online, I don't want to lose that community. So I was still running that and that's, that's a fertility yoga session, but one by in which you can take at your own pace. You can talk to me beforehand about where you were up to with things, and there's normally lots of restoration and guided meditation and breathwork and there, and a little bit of a chance to see who's there and have a chat or ask any questions if you want to. So that's my monthly session online.

And then I will be doing my North Star course again in the autumn. I think I had 17 women join that in the spring and it was wonderful. It was just a little community and it just felt gorgeous, so I'm really looking forward to doing that again. And that's why we go on this journey of looking at your inner compass and we'd play around with north, south, east, and west and then we do lots of, do lots of things about reflecting and recalibrating on where we're up to with, with our experience and where we want to go.

And then I'm going to be dipping and diving into slightly different things. I'll be doing some women's circles, in the studio. And I want to also work with people that have become pregnant, and that are kind of in that landscape and working out what that, you know, if. We quite often don't think beyond, because we're concentrating on where we are going to get, so I want to, I want my community to be able to stay with me.

But I'm also very passionate about working with people, honouring grief as well and honouring loss, and honouring endings. Moving on when cycles haven't worked out at that time, when we're in that space of grieving. So there will be things that I'll be doing with that. Yeah, all sorts of ideas bubbling up. So kind of watch this space really...

Sarah: Beautiful. I'll definitely be watching. I can't wait to see what's sort of on the horizon for you and your community. And I know that the best place to meet with you and hang out with you is on Instagram. Isn't it Helen?

Helen: Yes, that's my playground at the moment. My website is evolving, but yeah, Instagram is where I hang out. The Fold. So you can find me there. You can ask me anything at all. If you're thinking, oh, I'm not sure about any of that, or you need an idea, or you want to ask questions about yoga and what might work at different points for you? Then I'm always around in my direct messages, or even if you're just having a hard day, I'm always there. So if anyone's listening, please consider me a resource.

Sarah: Beautiful. Thank you. Well, I will add your Instagram handle onto the podcast page www.fertilemindset.com/podcast. And we'll put your website link there as well because I think in the future, you're going to have your dates and your events coming up and it's going to be, yeah, both ways to keep in touch with you. Thank you so much for joining me today, Helen. This is a conversation that could go on for hours. I know it could, and I hope that we do speak again, in the future because I know there's a lot of directions that this can go in, and I'm really pleased that you are now kind of devoting yourself to this.

You know, I know you've got your own family and obviously other things in your life, but you are so passionate about this, and I'm pleased that it is your kind of sole professional purpose. Now it's amazing to see what's going to happen next.

Helen: Thank you so much.

Sarah: You're so welcome. Thank you for joining us. And we'll be speaking to you soon as well in my Sanctuary group, with the members. So anyone who's listening, who is a subscription member of the Fertile Mindset Sanctuary, you'll be able to come and chat to

Helen directly as well. Just look out for your emails and there'll be a live chat happening soon for you.

Thank you so much, Helen. We're looking forward to that.

Helen: Thanks very much Sarah.

Sarah: Take care. Bye-bye

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.