



EP 42: Why don't you just adopt?

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 if this is the first time listening to this podcast then I want to give you an extra special warm welcome. It's lovely to hear about new listeners joining us, and I hope that you find all the support you need for your fertility journey here. Do take a look at the previous episodes too, and if you're enjoying the podcast, it would be really lovely to read a review from you on Apple Podcasts, and the reviews help more people discover the podcasts that will really help them too.

So, on to today's topic which as an adoptive mother, is close to my heart. We're talking about that much said but very annoying phrase "why don't you just adopt?" This is one of those unhelpful pieces of advice given by people who don't have much or perhaps any understanding of what it's like to have fertility issues, but once they find out that's what you're dealing with, they feel compelled to say something as ridiculous as "why don't you just adopt?" It's clear that they think this is a quick fix and the easier option than going through years of fertility tests and treatments, but that just shows how little understanding or real-life experience they have of what it's like to both be dealing with fertility issues and also about what it means to adopt a child and what that process is like.

Now I am speaking to you today as a mother to two children, and our second child was adopted into our family. And whilst I'm not going to share much about my own story in this episode - but can do that another time if that's of interest to you – I am going to share my knowledge and experience of what is really behind that concept of "just adopting".

I'm going to share how it feels to be told that you should just adopt, and what is actually behind making that decision. The unique challenges involved in the process of adopting and being an adoptive family, and also the gifts it brings too. I'll touch on the practicalities of adopting a child, and finally I'll talk about the mindset piece and the one thing that helped me to have a successful and enjoyable adoption process.

So, if the idea of adoption is on your radar at all, or maybe you're already going down that route, then I hope this episode is helpful for you. And if there's anything else you'd like to ask

me after this episode, then do get in touch either on Instagram where you can find me @fertile_mindset or by sending me an email to mail@fertilemindset.com

Let's start with that phrase, the: "Why don't you just adopt?" If you haven't yet had this said to you then you are fortunate because it's a really hard question to answer isn't it, when you're just put on the spot. I know some people like to answer it with, "why don't you adopt?" and pointing out that it's an option for all people, not just those with fertility issues. It's a hard question to answer because there is so much that needs to be considered and taken into account before embarking on an adoption journey. It's nowhere near the simple solution that those asking the question think it is. I honestly think that some people believe that you pop down to the local orphanage where there are a selection of newborn babies, and you will be thanked for your kindness as a baby is handed over to you to take home. Yes, some people are still stuck in the 1950's era of adoption and have no idea what modern day adoption from the care system involves. In fact when someone suggested to me that they believed adoption was just like I described here, I have been known to say, "it's not the 1950's any more you know". Babies are rarely "given up" for adoption. Instead the vast majority of babies, and more often toddlers and older children, are taken into care before they are adopted, due to neglect or abuse. The priority is always to keep a child with their birth family, so if they have reached the point of needing a family through adoption, then there will be a history, which is part of what needs to be considered when you decide to adopt a child.

The thing is, when someone suggests adoption, they think they are being helpful and giving you an easier or more straightforward option to create your family. But what you know is that adoption isn't simple and easy, and to decide to adopt is a massive decision and a complete change of direction to what you are currently doing. Their simple advice can feel like they are minimising or trivialising the situation you are in, and that can hurt. It can also make us angry. How dare they be so flippant, so ignorant, do they really think I didn't know adoption exists? I understand how you feel, I really do, and if this happens to you the best thing, I can suggest is to momentarily put yourself in their shoes, with their lack of experience and knowledge. They think they are being helpful, and maybe they mean well. And that's enough. Let their comments wash over you and let them go. And if you come up with a clever response, do share that with me!!

If you have researched adoption at all, you will have learnt that there are quite a few steps to go through before you are finally matched with and able to adopt a child. And I know that it is this process of application, in depth assessment, report writing and training, followed by being in front of a panel of people deciding your fate, that puts off many people. Some people have told me that they would have considered adopting but they just couldn't face the process to get there. And I get that, I really do, especially when you've already been through many months or years of fertility tests, appointments, treatments, and negative pregnancy tests. It can be exhausting and depleting, so where is the extra energy required to begin a whole new process, supposed to come from?

Early on in our adoption training we were told not to look at adoption as adding a child to your family, but as giving a family to that child. In other words, that adoption is for the child primarily, not for us. That's quite an interesting and maybe a bit of a confronting way of looking at it, isn't it? In the years of fertility struggles we long for our baby, and have that instinct to be a mother, be a parent, and yes adoption can fulfil that need, but primarily adoption exists to give families to children, not to give children to families. If you're considering adoption, maybe reflect on that, see how it feels to you. I feel it's a perspective we can have with parenting any child, no matter how that child comes to us. We do not own the child, they are a soul, who has come into our family, and what a privilege that is, to give a home, a family, a life to that child, to that soul.

Something that is very different about adopting a child is that you have a choice in the situation. Conceiving a child, even when using fertility treatment such as IVF is a pretty random process. If and when you do conceive you have no idea who that child is, whereas

when you adopt you are raising your hand to give a home and a family to a specific child. And I think that's a special connection, and a very special part of the adopted child's story.

The truth is that every single adopted child has experienced loss, and that loss, that disconnection from their birth mother will leave its mark in some way. And when you share their story with an adopted child there is that recognition of their loss and separation from the family that gave them life, and then a welcoming from the family who will be by that child's side for the rest of their life.

And depending on which country you are in and what your adoption process looks like, not only do you have a say in the child you choose to adopt, and you can convey this to your child and why and how you chose them, but you may have also have been chosen as the family – or a potential family for your child. Many people are involved in the whole process of protecting the child and keeping them out of harm's way, and then matching them with the right family. When I think of all the people that were involved in my adopted son's early life, and all their kindness and focus on making sure he was safe and loved, it blows me away. And it's a story he loves us to share with him.

When you adopt you have to remember that their story, the story of what happened before they were adopted, then also becomes your family's story. It doesn't feel like there's a before and after to me; it's more a continuation of the story, the same story of their life from conception through to the present day when they are with you. It can feel both an honour to be playing a big part in your child's story, and also quite overwhelming, and at times difficult to come to terms with.

In the adoption training and assessment you are prepared to parent a child who may have suffered trauma, neglect, abuse, and definitely loss. Your eyes are opened to the many many reasons why a child may need to be adopted and it's heart breaking, but it does help you feel prepared. I felt well prepared, and as well as the training, I read countless books and spoke to many families who had adopted children, and also to adult adoptees about their experience of being adopted. I did feel prepared, and our social worker said we were too. However when we were matched with our little boy and asked if we wanted to be his parents, we then had his real-life story laid out in front of us. This wasn't theory, it wasn't someone else's story. This was our potential future son's own unique story. It was unique – it wasn't exactly like any of the other adoption stories I'd heard. So we learnt everything we could about his life up to this point and we worked hard to get to know and understand him before we even met for the first time.

It was a completely different way to begin parenting a child than we'd experienced with our first child, and it was very special to be entrusted with parenting this little boy.

I feel like we went on quite a journey to go from trying to conceive, to adopting our son, and it does take time to get to that point so take plenty of time to prepare. The typical process of adopting can begin by attending a talk or open evening with an adoption agency. For us this coincided with us starting our own research, reading and speaking to friends who had experience of adoption. We then had an interview, and once accepted we went on to various stages of training alongside other men and women, and in-depth assessment which included weekly conversations in our home with our social worker which would last up to 3 or 4 hours, and lots and lots of writing. We wrote essays on our experiences of our childhood, our marriage, and many other topics, which combined with many completed forms, references from our friends and family, and finally a tick sheet where we could state yes, no or maybe to having a child with various conditions, disabilities or other issues which felt very odd to complete as we didn't want to exclude whole groups of children without even meeting them, meant that our form had a mostly the 'maybe' boxes ticked.

This package of evidence about us as would-be adopted parents was collated and then looked at by a panel of 10 people, who also questioned us on its contents and on our

suitability to parent an adopted child. Although that sounds daunting and yes I was definitely a bag of nerves of the day, the actual experience was far better and friendlier than I imagined, and within a few minutes of waiting for their verdict we were told that we were approved to adopt which was the best feeling in the process – second only to both meeting the same panel a few months later to seek their agreement to adopting our son, and then a short time after, meeting him for the first time and our eyes locking as he reached his arms out to be held by me.

Just remembering these steps of our own adoption experience now brings back all the love, excitement and nerves we felt at the time. It was such a special time, and adopting a child was definitely the right step for us.

I know it can be a difficult decision to make, and I feel it's even harder to consider when you are still very much trying to conceive a baby. Most adoption agencies have a policy of having some time between the last IVF cycle and then starting the adoption process, and although this can be infuriating if you want to get started, I think it's useful to have some space between these two very different paths to parenthood.

I know that I needed to feel that I was walking down just one path, and in my mind, I saw a huge brick wall separating the two paths. This meant that once I had chosen the adoption path, there was no doubt in my mind that this was where we were headed, and I would never glance over to the other side. The moment I decided to adopt, I felt like my child was out there waiting. They may not have been born, or even conceived yet, but I knew that they were there, and this drew all my attention towards adopting and away from conceiving.

Many people have told me the same, and it's important that you find your own way to be at peace and completely comfortable with your decision if you do go down this route. I know that having this clarity was so helpful for me, and I'm sure it's what set the scene for us to have a relatively easy and enjoyable adoption process, that was ultimately successful in matching us with exactly the right little boy.

If you have listened to this episode with adoption in mind for yourself, I hope that it's given you some things to think about and reflect on, so you can find your own way to parenthood by adoption, if this does feel right for you.

As I said at the start, I'm very happy to chat more about adoption or answer any of your questions. I'm also happy to share more about our own experience of adoption in another podcast episode. Let me know, and send any questions you have too, either my direct message on my Instagram @fertile_mindset or email at mail@fertilemindset.com

Thank you for joining me today on the Fertile Mindset Podcast, and I look forward to speaking with you again next week!

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.