



EP 048: The Emotional Considerations of Solo Parenthood with Mel Johnson

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, where today I'm sharing a conversation with another guest to the podcast. And this time it's Mel Johnson from The Stork and I. When I think of Mel, I think of the beautiful community of solo mums and solo mums-to-be that she has created her free Facebook group.

The Stork and I Mum Tribe is a really supportive place to be for anyone on a solo motherhood journey, the interactions, and the support in that are amazing. And that kind of support isn't always possible to find among friends and family. So if you are pursuing solo motherhood, I really recommend joining Mel's group.

Now, Mel and I had a really good catch-up recently, where we recorded for her podcast first, The Stork and I Podcast, and we talked about EFT and how it can be used for support on any fertility journey and specifically the journeys of solo mums. And then we recorded together for this podcast where Mel talked about solo motherhood and how mindset shifts around clarity, comparisons and more, are so important when making decisions, having treatment and generally navigating your way through solo motherhood.

I really, really enjoyed this conversation with Mel, and I hope that you do too.

Hello, Mel. Welcome to the podcast. It's really lovely to have you here.

Mel: Thank you very much. It's great to be here.

Sarah: We've been in touch for quite a while, haven't we? With our kind of, sometimes we have mutual clients and women who are having support from both of us, and other times it's just really great to be able to refer people that come into my world and my community to you, because it is such a niche group. Has now a really specialist group of women that you support?

Mel: Yeah, absolutely. So, I support single women who would like to have a baby, but are not in a relationship, and they're considering what their options are basically.

Sarah: Okay. Great. And I don't know about you, but I find that this is a growing group of women. I feel like there's many more women now who are reaching that point in their lives for whatever reason. And because there are options out there, there are ways to become a mother, as a solo mum, it's yeah, it's opened up a whole world of possibilities. Hasn't it?

Mel: Absolutely. I think it's hugely growing. So when I was in this position, myself, probably about five years ago when I was considering this, I didn't know anybody else who was in this situation, so I felt quite alone actually in that. But now the community's hugely growing. I've actually done quite a lot of research about why it's grown so much, and I think that the research lends itself to the fact that what we were looking for years ago is very different to what we're looking for now.

And it's, you know, it that our expectations of a relationship are much greater, the choice that we've got, you know, it used to be probably meeting someone at the local community dance, and now it's like, you can meet anyone, anywhere in the world, at any time, at the touch of a button. So like, and then it says that the more chances you've got the less likely to make a choice you are. And then also resources. So, you know, back in the day, women had to get married if they wanted to leave the family home. Whereas now obviously women are independent, we've got our own career, money. So we don't have to meet somebody. They have to be a great addition to our lives. And because of all of those different things, more and more people are struggling to meet the right person. And meet somebody who's looking for the same thing as them at the same time. And looking at what their options are because they don't want to miss out on parenthood just because they haven't found the right partner basically.

Sarah: Absolutely. Yeah. And as you were speaking there, it really struck me how quickly things have changed. And if I think back to the generation before us, our parents, my mum was a single mum not by choice, but very early on, in the first year of my life, she became a single mum. And that was the early eighties really that I was going to school and that she was meeting other mums and other families. And she said she was the only one. You know, she was the only single mum on the playground among all of her friends. And it made her feel quite different, you know, and it was, it was a new kind of way of mothering them, single mum not by choice, but through divorce.

So now fast forward to the 21st century, you know, just one generation later. And yeah, like you say, women are in a very different position now and able to make that choice, if they wish to. To be a single mum by choice, and I guess go through fertility treatment, which is another hurdle, isn't it as well? It's not just the decision, but then how do I become pregnant.

Mel: Yeah, I agree. And I think what's quite nice is It says lots of different family forms now, so it's not, you know, obviously there are still a lot of like the nuclear family, but, but there's lots of other types and so definitely I think people feel less like they're doing something completely unique. More like there are lots of different ways families are made, and this is just one of them. Which is, which is always easier.

But yeah, then you take, potentially, quite a long time and big consideration of whether you want to choose solo motherhood as a path to starting your own family. And then yeah, having to go through fertility treatments to make that happen can be, you know, I hate to say the word, but a massive roller coaster.

Sarah: Yeah, as you say that, you know, that there is that massive decision to make and for many different reasons that I guess I'm used to seeing women at that stage often, you know,

there'll be in my community, trying to decide whether or not to go it alone. Maybe they were in a partnership before, maybe it was the fertility treatment itself that kind of caused the breakup of the relationship even. From your perspective then, both personally, and I know the many, many women that you supported, what are the key areas that are considered then when, when a woman chooses to embark on this journey? What kind of things do they look at and think about?

Mel: I think the first thing is the first big decision is, do I want to do this? And so, I mean, I think some people, and I would say I was in this category, are really clear that they want to become a parent. And it doesn't really matter in what form that takes, you know, but they're just super clear that they'll do whatever it takes to make that happen.

Then you've got people who are really clear. They just. That's not on that plan, you know, their life plan. They don't want to be a parent. And if you're in either of those categories, it's almost a bit easier because you're just very clear, and you can take actions towards that.

There's another category of people who, who are just not quite sure. And they're trying to figure out, Is this something that I want in my life? And it can be an added complexity to say, well, I thought I did if I was with a partner, but now I'm not, do I still want to do this? So I think the first decision is. You know, is this something I want to pursue? And if we look at society, you know, I think people find it quite difficult to decide that they don't want to become a parent because actually everything in society says that success is around meeting a partner and having children.

And so one of the things that I take people through is really trying to get clarity on, is this something that you want? Is it something that you want no matter what your relationship status is? And then if people decide this is something they want, what I do is talk them through the entire process from, we split it into three different sections, the emotional side of things. So, lots of people felt like they have to grieve for how they thought that they would become a parent. The, you know, the factual side of things. So like, how do you do this? You know, what are my options? What treatments do I need to have? How much is it all going to cost? Where do I go? That side of things.

And then lastly, the more practical side of things. So how do I set myself up to make this successful? What support would I need in place? How do I prepare myself? And how do I manage this process? So that's the sort of three areas that I split this up and support people on that journey with.

Sarah: There is a lot to think about isn't there a new layer out like that, you know? And I can understand how, if you are of the mind that, yes, I definitely want children no matter what, it kind of can make that transition easier, I guess, because you've already made up your decision that you definitely will have children, as a single mum, and you're comfortable with that. And then it's looking at all those different factors, but it's quite a lot to find your way through. Isn't it?

And I guess at the same time, as we all do. And you know, I know it's not healthy and supportive, but we all kind of compare ourselves, don't we, against others? And what will others think? And you know, what will society as a whole think of us? And will I stand out in the playground and what were my questions? You know, how they answer the questions of who's, you know, where's the dad and have you got a husband and so on? So yeah, there's so much to think about Mel, isn't there?

Mel: I think comparison is a huge topic in this area. It's one I spent a lot of time on helping people work through because, if you spend lots of time looking at what everyone else is doing, it takes energy from what you're doing and what you're trying to achieve, but it's a really difficult thing to let go of what everyone else is doing. And there's some practical

things that you can do to really focus on yourself, focus on what you want, and try to block out what other people are doing, because that's just a distraction often, in terms of achieving what you want. So, yeah, I think comparison is a big topic in this area that lots of people have to spend some time working through.

Sarah: Yeah. And like you said there, it's all about coming back to yourself, isn't it? And I think we automatically go into that comparison mode, don't we? We don't even realise we're doing it. And it's just this kind of constant dialogue in our head about what we're doing, what other people are doing, what feels right, what others are thinking. But I guess if we can start to recognise that and bring ourselves back to the big, why we're doing this, and, you know, reminding ourselves, I guess that's helpful.

Mel: Agree. And I think just being really clear, what you said, on what our goals are. The more clarity you have on what you want in your life, the more clarity that we can get on how we can get there and putting all of our energy and focus on achieving what we want, what's important for us. I think that is the key. Because all of the energy spent looking at what other people are doing and where we are in comparison to that, is taking away from us achieving our goals, but to achieve that we need to, first of all, be really clear.

So I think the work is around, really having a great clarity on where we're trying to get to, and putting all of our energy and focus on that. And exactly what you said, being aware when our energy is being taken off that and starting to look more into what others are doing. So awareness of that is definitely the key, because that allows you to make changes and to refocus on what you want to be doing in your life.

Sarah: And I know, you know, from the women that I've supported, that I know have been alongside with your support as well, and, and being in your amazing group and seeing women at every stage of their journey, whether they are, like you say, at that decision-making place, or whether they're now parenting a baby, a toddler, you know, a growing child. It's lovely how you bring everyone together. And they're all kind of supporting each other, but yeah, I can see how for many. Once they have that clarity and they, they really start moving forward with that certainty, and this is what I want. There will be hurdles. There will be no difficulties along the way, there's no doubt. Like there is on every path to parenthood, even without the extra, you know.

But yeah, that, that clarity and that certainty and that assuredness of yourself and your own decision can make such, such a big difference. I can really see that. So how, how can someone really set themselves up then if they're at that stage of deciding, or maybe they're already embarking on that solo motherhood journey? What kind of things can they do to really, you know, make sure it's as successful as possible? And I always look at success in different ways, you know, success is that end goal, isn't it? Of having the baby and being the family that you visualise, but also, it's about taking care of yourself in the meanwhile, isn't it? And not losing yourself as the woman who's on this journey. You know, and that, and that's all kind of great preparation for motherhood as well, to take care of yourself on the journey.

Mel: Absolutely because this is something that can really be all consuming and start taking over your life. And that's something that I speak to people about in terms of, are you still focusing on other areas of your life or is this becomes so all-consuming that it's the only thing that you've got happening? And that can be really unhealthy. So definitely having a look at, is there any readjustments that you want to do to make sure that this isn't the only focus in your life? And as you need to rebalance some other things that you used to do?

But I think the key thing for people in terms of setting themselves up is support network. So, if you're going through this with a partner, you've got that person to turn to and to support. And obviously depending on the partner, that's more or less successful depending on who they are. And actually I do point that out to people, because some people think that if you've

got a partner, everything will be fine because you've got that partner to provide you support. But actually I speak to many women who say their partner isn't giving them the support that they want, and that's a challenge in itself. So we need to remember that the grass isn't always greener. It doesn't mean just because you've got a partner everything is easier. And I think that's a really key thing that we should all remember.

But having the people there to support you. Getting your, I call it your mum tribe, in place. So who are you going to talk through this decision with? Who are you going to get to help you make the decision? And maybe that's no one. Maybe that's someone, something that you want to do completely independently, but lots of people have some trusted people that they want to talk that through.

And then at every stage of the process, you know, who is there for you, who is going to support you emotionally, practically? Having that support network is key. And I think one of the things that I say is you can do this completely alone. And you know, sadly the pandemic showed us that. There was many people who had to just do this on their own. There wasn't anybody else that then could come and help them.

But it's not the most desirable place, I would say. And maybe some people are happy doing it completely solo, but for many, and definitely for myself, it's about collecting that amazing group of people. So it's about creating your family, your family isn't just the people that you've, you know, your relations, per say. It can be all the amazing people in your life that you choose to create your family. And building that around you, making you feel like you're not alone. So solo motherhood doesn't need to mean alone. That's very key for me. So low motherhood means you're not doing it with a romantic partner, but you can be doing this as so many other amazing people who are really there for you and supporting you through this. And I think that it's absolute key.

I think the other thing is the financial element, you know, so very different things. You need to make sure that you have got the finances in place to both go through the treatments and then to look after yourself and a child's going forward. And the more planning and the more saving and the more understanding of your financial situation, of what you need to do to get yourself into the right place, I think that's a real critical thing, as a starting point to get you, to set you up, to be able to do this.

Sarah: Yeah, I can really hear how that's like laying the foundations to make this a successful journey, you know, cause it's, who knows how long it's going to take, you know, whether you will be able to conceive quickly, or whether further treatment will be needed?

But knowing that, actually, when you get to that end goal, and you have your baby in your arms and you are a single mum, that you have everything in place then to, to be cared for, and supported. And like you said, have the financial support, whatever else is needed to make this. Yeah, a possible and successful journey into motherhood. You talked about your support network, and I follow your stories on Instagram Mel, I just always find them so wonderfully supportive for the community that you're within. Because you share the real, real issues, don't you? I mean, I saw one the other day where you were just talking about going for a supermarket shop. Which might seem like nothing, you know, it might be that, well that's not a big deal, is it?

But when you're a single mum and you've got a little toddler who, you know, it's not their favourite thing to go to the supermarket, if they're tired or whatever, and it can make everything so much harder, can't it? And I know that you have really great support in your, your mum as well, don't you, and friends and so on. You know, I can tell that you really like to share how you've built up your own support so that if you do need to go to the supermarket, you've got your mum or whoever else that could look after your daughter so that it can be easier and you know, much, much less stressful than it would be otherwise.

Mel: And, and much cheaper, let me tell you that. If I take my toddler to the supermarket, my bill's going to be a lot more expensive than if I go on my own. But I think that the critical thing is, and the thing about my Instagram, part of my reason for starting The Stork and I was to challenge the fairy tale that we've been brought up with.

So our generation has grown up with the classic fairy tale being, you meet a partner, you get married and you live happily ever after. And that was the conclusion of the films we've watched, the books we read, the fairy tales that were told to us. It really is deeply embedded into us. And I didn't realise how much until I started researching it a bit more.

And that takes a lot of unpacking to do because that is just what we were told happily ever after will look like. And if that doesn't happen for us, then we can feel like a failure. And what I don't want to do is unpack of that and put a different narrative in place only to replace it with a different fairy tale.

So I do see some accounts of parenthood, which in my view are absolute fantasy. You know, they, they just share all these amazing moments and all this, and that's nice to see, you know, but it isn't the reality. And I feel like I've got a responsibility, if people are looking at my account and trying to decide whether this is what they want to do, I've got a responsibility to show a real version of it, not a different fairy tale, because I don't want people knocking on my door in a few years' time saying, whoa, this is not what you said it was.

So I try to show a very balanced view. I also try to respect my daughter's privacy, you know, so it's, it's trying to find that balance. But I think that. One thing I definitely talk about is inviting people into my life to help me.

One of the things about the community of people considering selling motherhood as a generalisation, many of the women are strong, independent women who have not had to ask for help. Maybe we've bought our own house. We've got a successful career. We travel on our own, you know, everything we do, we are able to do really successfully on our own. My personal experiences that with parenting, you can be more successful if you ask other people to help you with different aspects of that. It's better for me, it's better for my daughter and getting used to be able to ask for that help can be tricky, because it's not something that we've ever had to do before, particularly. But the benefits are amazing. And so I would say it's hugely strengthened my connection with friends and family, so our relationship has really gone to a new level because I've been more vulnerable. I've told them how I'm feeling, I've told them I, you know, I could benefit from their help, and really great friends know that, and they go the extra mile.

And so I would say it's split into two areas, you've got the practical side of things and so an example of that is the supermarket, like you say. So if I can just pop to the supermarket quickly without having to take a toddler, it's just so. I don't need to have that, I could take her, but having the option just makes it, life so much easier.

And then you've got the more emotional side of things, and a great example of this is I went away for the weekend, this weekend, and one of my friends just took my daughter to the park with her children so that I could just have half an hour of adult time to catch up with my other friends, because otherwise, sometimes you go and catch up with people and you end up barely speaking to them because your whole attention is taken with the children. And having someone who just intuitively knows that and says, let me just give you a little bit of time to catch up. That's just such a gift and I'm so lucky to have friends who will do that for me.

But I've also spoken quite openly about the need for that and the benefits of it. So, and lots of people have stepped up and done that. And I think everyone's a winner because our connections are strengthened. It's great for me. It's good for my daughter. So yeah, super important.

Sarah: It's that old adage, isn't it? This is coming to mind of how it takes a village to raise a child and more than ever, you know, when you don't have just the, like you say, the stereotypical perhaps seen as fairy tale, partner, husband, there to support you through this, which isn't always a fairy tale, let's be honest. You know, you're, you have to be more proactive and rewrite your story, don't you and make it work for you?

Mel: Exactly. And I think we're all responsible for creating our own fairy tales and we can write our version of that. And maybe some people are living that fairy tale life, but I don't think it's because they've got a partner like that. They've created whatever version of that fairy tale for themselves, and we can also create a different version of that fairy tale. And that's what I help people try to unpick. What they presumed would happen, and the fact that that isn't happening, what can they have instead, which is equally positive? It's different and it's accepting that it's going to be different and creating it in a way that's equally positive. And that's certainly how I feel my life is.

Sarah: Yeah, there doesn't have to just be, well, we know there isn't just one path to happiness and one path to having that family. You know, I could see it when I was being brought up from, with just my mum, and also as an only child that I was very different to all my friends that had siblings and that had dads at home, or if they, you know, later on in life, if they had that's in their life, but they were separated or divorced. And I was very aware how different my upbringing was, but actually I was really thankful for it as well, because I saw people falling out with their siblings and I saw parents arguing and, you know, all sorts of stuff. So I thought he knows, I love my little unit that we have just me and my m you know, we, we get along great, and I just have one parent to go to, it's not confusing about, am I allowed to do this or not? You know, especially when it got to the teenage years, it was very clear cut, you know, that I went to one parent, and I knew where I stood. So there are many, many ways aren't there to write the story. And I guess it's about stepping into the path that you wish to.

And I know sometimes it's not from choice, you know, its life circumstance, of course, that a woman gets to a certain age and starts to think like it's now or never, you know, am I going to make this decision? And then yeah, writing, writing your own story to live the rest of your life. Now we've touched on the emotional side, and of course, you know, what I'm really fascinated in Mel is the emotional impact and also the way that our mindset and our emotions can support our journey to parenthood, whatever that looks like, whether or not it includes fertility treatment in this case, you know, or any fertility struggles should I say, or not? How, I'm curious a bit more about that as well. You know, how can we really support ourselves with the emotional side? How would you kind of advise people to, to prepare themselves for that journey that they're on, you know, how was it for you as well, making that decision and then traveling down that path?

Mel: Yeah, I think for me personally, it was really difficult. I struggled to let go of my fairy tale version of how things were going to be. So I took a long time to work through that and that's now why I do what I do and support other people to do it. Cause I learned a lot and I feel like I can support other people to do that, but I think how we can best support ourselves and how we can best prepare, I split it into two different things.

I think the first thing is find our tribe. So when I was going through this, I didn't know anybody else who was in the same situation. I have nobody to look at, there wasn't anyone in the public eye, even, you know, so there's no role models of seeing people who've done this and are happy and are, you know, doing it in a, in a great way. And I think that's changing now.

So there's more people now that we can look up that are doing this that are happy and you can feel a little bit reassured that, okay. It's not just me that's in this situation. It doesn't mean that I failed, it is just my circumstances and I have choices. And I'm, and I'm lucky to live in a time where I have choices, honestly. And, let me connect with other people who really understand what I'm going through.

So that can be on social media, where we can see others who are in, let's say a less conventional family structure, and also let me connect with some people in real life. So one of my passions, I call it like Solo mum matchmaking, to each, to each other, not to find a. I have connected people all around the world and because I speak to so many people, it's almost like now a hobby. I'm like, oh, I actually spoke to a really amazing person who lives right close to you. Shall I connect you? And then if both of them are happy to be connected, I connected them. And people send me messages where they've had zoom calls with groups of people they're connected with, or they've had meetups, or they've met a person that I suggested to them. And the power of that community is unbelievable. And I know that first-hand because I'm in it myself.

So, I have met people in the last two years, who I'm as connected with on a friendship level of people that I've known all my life, because they really just get my situation. They're in an exact same situation and I've made such good friendships. And that for me is so important because you feel connected, you feel understood. You've got people there for support. So I would say that one is key.

I think the other thing. It says lots of work that we can do, on reviewing what our beliefs are and questioning them, and then replacing them and reframing things. So we've grown up believing different things because that's what was happening at that time. And things are changing. My view is we'll always look, we'll always find what we look for. So if you are convinced that everybody in a partner, everyone who has a partner, will be in a better situation than you, you will find no end of evidence to support that because that's what you're looking for. And you'll find what you're looking for.

If you look for a more balanced view and, you know, I always say there are some things that we'll be easier with a partner and some things that will be more challenging. Then you'll find a more balanced view of that because that's what you're looking for. So I always say to people, don't just look for the things to reinforce what you think would be better in a different situation. Look for things to reinforce what's amazing in your current situation and how you can really embrace that. And I think those two things add up to really great preparation to support yourself through this.

And then lastly, just knowing what works in every other area of your life. So what is, what do you use to get through things? Is it meditation? Is it talking to other people? Is it tapping? Is it, you know, whatever it might be? And then can you bring that area into this bit of your life to support you through this?

Sarah: I love that Mel, such practical direction there, and I'm guessing this is from day one when you're even making the decision, you know, it doesn't need to be down the road when you're already pregnant or with your baby, that you have your mum friends, Is it? You know, any point now it's so useful isn't it, to reach out and have those connections, to look at things differently, to start gathering all the evidence? I love that actually, that's a really, a really good mind hack, Isn't it? You know, because there is evidence out there to support absolutely anything. And it depends where we put our focus and what we choose to focus on that we can create a reality and support our decisions. So that's really powerful. Really beautiful. Thank you so much.

Now you talked about your community there and how wonderful it is for people to make the connections with each other, and I've seen that as well, first-hand in your group, it is really

beautiful, such amazing support. Could you tell us a little bit more about that group and about the other support that you have and where we can keep in touch with.

Mel: Yeah. So, there's a couple of things. If you go to my website, which is thestorkandi.com and its stork, S T O R K. Some people have messaged me with the other stalk, S T A L K like stalking someone.

Sarah: Oh, my goodness. There's so many storks.

Mel: I was like, oh my goodness. So, yeah, so thestorkandi.com and that gives you a good overview of everything that is available. I've got a podcast, which of course you have been a guest on, I offer group coaching courses, which is for people considering this as a route to parenthood, as well as those who are pregnant. We have a course where a group of pregnant solo mums get together which is super lovely and powerful. And I am just about to launch a membership site. So I'm a very small monthly membership to get access, to talks with different people, support groups, to each other, the sessions that I run, a whole heap of different things, just to feel really part of that community. And like you say, it's from the initial consideration of, is this something that I might want to do, down to, I'm solo parenting a 3-year-old, or however old, what should I do? What are my challenges? How can I connect with other people who really get it? So the whole range.

Sarah: Yeah, and every single step along the way, because I think what's unique about your people Mel is that, you know, they don't necessarily know whether there are fertility issues as such until they start to try. But it's going to involve some kind of intervention in order to get pregnant and yeah, taking it one step at a time and getting the support where you need it for whatever happens, so that you get to that the end point with your baby. So, it's really, really inspiring to listen to you Mel. I always knew that you had this amazing community there and you were bringing those mums together, but to hear you speak about it, now I can see even more of the magic that takes place.

So, what I'm going to do Mel is put all the links of every way that people could get in touch with you, on the show notes, so that they can check those, and join your group and keep in touch with you. I would also, anyone listening that is at that point of either considering or is there any on that path. Do you follow me on social media, follow her stories on Instagram, because it's wonderful just to start putting yourself in that world, Isn't it? That world of, of being with a single mum and seeing how life is and imagining yourself in their shoes. So, thank you for being that open and vulnerable with us about your own experience Mel it's really, really appreciated.

Mel: You're welcome. Thank you for having me.

Sarah: You're very welcome. Thank you for joining us today. It's been a really wonderful conversation. Thanks.

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.