



EP 062: Thoughts on Navigating Secondary Infertility

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, or welcome for the very first time if you've just newly found us! It's lovely to have you here and I hope you enjoy listening in to this episode, and any of the previous 61 episodes too.

Now today I want to speak about something that can feel like one of the outlying issues related to fertility, but definitely needs acknowledgement, conversations around it, and support too. What I'm going to talk about is secondary infertility, meaning having fertility issues, and finding it difficult to get pregnant or stay pregnant when you're trying for a second or subsequent baby. For some this is a continuation of the fertility issues they had when they first tried for a baby and may mean going through the same steps and the same treatment as they did the first time. This was my situation when we decided to try for a second baby, and I mistakenly believed that if I did everything exactly the same as we did first time round when I finally got pregnant and had my baby, then it was guaranteed to work again. But I was wrong, and both me and my husband were in a different place, a more challenging place, fertility wise, the second time round and what worked the first time didn't work again so it felt like we were starting over again.

Secondary infertility can also strike for the first time when you're trying for a subsequent baby after an easy, natural conception before. And this can be equally puzzling as you think back to the first experience of trying for a baby that was so easy and straightforward, and wonder why it's not happening this time.

There is so much that can be explored and investigated to find the causes and the solutions from both a medical, and my specialism, a mindset perspective, but before that I want to address something very important, and the reason why secondary infertility isn't always talked about and recognised as openly as primary infertility. There is a stigma, and a fear that their problems and the struggle around them might be dismissed because they have a child already. They may hear the words from others, or they may say it to themselves. You should be happy. You already have a child, or two children or however many. You should be grateful and stop complaining because there are many people struggling to have one baby, who would love to be in your shoes with your apparent problem, putting the air quotes around the problem. With fear of this conversation happening or this inner dialogue going on

in their minds, is it any wonder that many people keep quiet about their fertility issues second time round?

I had an interaction with someone dealing with secondary infertility many years ago, that showed me how painful and vulnerable we can feel when we don't feel heard or understood, and how this can make us lash out to try and protect our tender emotions.

It was about 15 years ago when I was very newly pregnant with my first baby. I think I was 8 or 9 weeks pregnant after two and a half years of trying, a couple of early pregnancy losses, and currently having treatment to help me stay pregnant that time. I was both nervous and excited, and happy to be meeting up with some friends who had supported me through my fertility struggles and knew about my pregnancy when I hadn't made it public knowledge yet. They were quietly excited with me, and it was lovely to be able to share my news, if a little tentatively. One of those friends was also trying for her second baby. And when we had a moment alone, she said to me "you know it's so much harder when you're trying for a second baby and it's not happening, because I know now what I'm missing out on." At the time I was shocked, I had no idea what to say to her. She had a beautiful toddler aged daughter who I knew she desperately wanted to give a sibling, and I could see how her pain was different to mine. But to say that she knew it was harder for her than it was for me. That floored me.

Now, looking back, I can see that she could have been coming from anywhere with those comments. And I know how hard it is for people dealing with secondary infertility to ask for or receive the support and understanding they need and deserve. So, whilst her way of asking for support was kind of heavy handed, I can see where she was coming from.

What I want the main message of this podcast to be today is that if you are facing secondary infertility, or you know anyone who is, let's have compassion and understanding of whatever you, or they, are feeling. There is no wrong or right way to feel when you struggle to have a baby, whether that's for the first time or not. The emotional experience is different for everyone depending on your own history, your story, your own personal triggers and vulnerabilities. So, let's stop expecting everyone to act and react in the ways we think they should.

When we start to accept that a person's pain and their experience of it is their business and not ours, we can leave space for more kindness and compassion. And equally when you're experiencing secondary infertility yourself, be kind, be gentle, listen to what your heart is telling you. You may be telling yourself you should be grateful that you already have a child, but if there is pain there, it's there for a reason. Listen carefully, journal your thoughts, speak to a trusted friend or a therapist and let those thoughts and emotions be heard.

I have supported women who are trying for a baby for the first time, for their second, third or fourth baby, and I always listen to them. I have been on my own fertility journey, yes but my experience is not their experience. Your experience is not mine or anyone else's, so it's so important that we listen. We don't assume or make judgments about whether or not you should feel a certain way. For true emotional healing, that will lead to a calm, focused mind and greater resilience and strength, we first need to allow, recognise, and acknowledge exactly what we are feeling. So, that would be the first and very important step I'd recommend for you.

You can start by writing in a journal, and then talk to someone if you feel comfortable doing so. But take that step, whatever it is, and start recognising how you feel and knowing it's ok to feel this way, it's understandable to feel the way you do, whatever anyone else, or your inner critic is saying to you.

The other thing I'd love to talk to you about today in relation to secondary infertility, is what else could be going on with you that makes it perhaps even harder to have a baby second

time round. Now, I said earlier that we did everything the same second time round and expected to get pregnant again. But that's not strictly true, and I can see, now I have some distance, that there were marked differences in the way I tried for my first baby with the way I tried for the second. First time round, and for several months before we conceived, we were both following a strict fertility diet protocol, taking the best supplements, and for 3 months before I had weekly acupuncture and my husband had regular acupuncture too. The second time felt so different. We definitely wanted a second baby, that wasn't in any doubt at all, at any point, but we were also now parents to a baby who didn't sleep much, I worked less so we had less disposable income and our focus was split between caring for our baby and trying to conceive another. So I didn't commit to the weekly acupuncture. I actually had one, single session of Acupuncture! And any efforts with our diet this time round were probably negated by the severe lack of sleep. We were tired and depleted, and our fertility test results showed that. A borderline poor sperm count for him and not great progesterone levels for me had both dramatically plummeted and it felt like an uphill struggle to get pregnant again.

Whilst all that was going on due to us now being parents, as well as a couple who wanted another baby, there was another big factor at play for me that I can see now really impacted on my ability to fully engage with trying to conceive second time round.

We had said, since a year or so into our fertility journey, that we would try for 5 years and then we would adopt a child instead. That seemed like a good amount of time, and we were as excited about the idea of adopting as we were about having our own biological child. So, as we began, second time round, we were already two and a half years into the 5 years. And as the months and then years passed, I could feel myself getting closer and closer to the 5 years and my connection to adopting strengthened, until I could feel my interest in conceiving again fading away. It was quite remarkable, and I know very unique to me, to us and our own fertility journey. But I see now that that connection to adopting stopped me from committing 100% to conceiving again. And that's ok, it was our path to parenthood, and it did result in us finally having two children, one through birth and one through adoption.

So, my question to you is: what could be getting in the way of trying to conceive a second time round? What plans, thoughts, experiences or fears could be acting as a block in some way? Whenever I talk to someone who is struggling second time round when they didn't for their first, I ask them about their experience of pregnancy, or birth, and of new motherhood. Did it go how they expected? Were there any surprises? How do they feel looking back on their pregnancy, giving birth, and the first few weeks and months of parenting a newborn? And how does it feel to think about doing all of this again?

There can be unexplored and unhealed trauma around these experiences and memories that leave them feeling in two minds. They do want a baby, but at the same time they are dreading being pregnant again for whatever reason.

Where pregnancy was hard, maybe with health challenges along the way, or the birth didn't go the way they hoped it would and there may be trauma there, or the early days of motherhood were way harder than they expected. All of these are worth exploring and healing. I cannot emphasise this enough. If your heart is taking you one way towards your baby, but your mind and body are holding on to trauma that makes it feel scary, dangerous even, then you're going to feel this push-pull towards and away from having another baby.

Does that sound at all familiar to you? Now, EFT, Tapping is a fantastic tool to support you with any thoughts or fears around fertility, and to do any healing you need to, to feel comfortable moving ahead to have another baby. And if you haven't ever used EFT, or don't even know what it is, or you haven't yet used it for fertility support, then do join us in the Fertile Mindset Sanctuary where you'll receive tuition on how to use EFT, and then you can use it on anything you feel stuck, overwhelmed or confused with. EFT helps bring you back to your most natural and healthy perspective on whatever issue, whatever challenge you are facing. The Fertile Mindset Sanctuary is the home of EFT for fertility support, and you can

join us at fertilemindset.com/sanctuary. And if you'd like to chat about one-to-one EFT support with me, where I can guide you through the process, then feel free to get in touch at mail@fertilemindset.com. That's mail m a i l @fertilemindset.com. It would be lovely to hear from you.

Well, that's it for this week's podcast, and I will be back next week on Thursday 3rd March which is my birthday, and I look forward to spending some more time with you then.

Sending you so much love and support and see you soon.

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.