



EP 080: The experience of grief on a fertility journey with Nicola Duffell

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.

Before we begin, I want to let you know about the Budget Friendly Fertility Bundle that is on sale right now and until tomorrow, Friday 27th January. So if you're lucky enough to be listening to this podcast when it's released, there's still time to take a look at it and buy it for yourself. I created this bundle to bring together some amazing fertility support from some of the best fertility experts, by way of books, fertility assessments, and online courses guiding you through lots of wonderful support for your fertility - including yoga, hypnosis, womb massage, mindset techniques, including my course using EFT called CALM. There's also support to take you through fertility treatment, and nutrition based support - all kinds of amazing things. It's like a pick and mix of fertility goodies for your mind, body and soul. So if you're hearing this on or before the 27th January, do take this chance to get your bundle. It contains almost £3,000 worth of support, and is priced at just £99. You can find it at www.fertilemindset.com/bundle And I hope you find lots of really useful, nurturing support in there for you.

So, on with today's podcast with what is the last episode in this current series of conversations with some really lovely guests. I enjoyed recording these for you so much, and I gained and learned a lot for myself from each one.

Today's is particularly special as Nicola Duffell is someone I have known for the longest time. We first met over 30 years ago when we were in the same class at school. Then we were at college together too on the same course. And years later we got back in touch through the magic of social media, and it was at a time when Nicola was retraining in nutrition and coaching, and she was transitioning away from her corporate role and into the work she is truly meant to be doing. Nicola has an affinity with the experience of grief, drawing on her own losses and bringing in all her skills to support this inevitable part of the human experience.

Grief is something that is rarely talked about in relation to fertility and infertility, and I believe we need to talk about, need to acknowledge and bring it out into the open. So that's what Nicola and I did with this episode and I hope it brings you a deeper understanding of how

you may be feeling, and comfort too.

Let's begin.

Sarah ([00:00](#)):

Hello, Nicola, welcome to the Fertile Mindset Podcast. It's really lovely to have you here. How are you?

Nicola ([00:18](#)):

I'm good. I'm really excited.

Sarah ([00:21](#)):

I loved that little chat just before, and you know, gosh, we should have recorded that as well. But it's always, always a pleasure to catch up with you and hear what's going on because we've got a huge amount of history, haven't we?

Nicola ([00:33](#)):

We do. We do. Started off at secondary school together.

Sarah ([00:38](#)):

It'd be like 11 or 12. I don't know what age we first met, but yeah, that's too many years ago.

Nicola ([00:44](#)):

That's scary to think about how many years that's been actually.

Sarah ([00:48](#)):

I know.

Nicola ([00:48](#)):

When we used to sit in French class.

Sarah ([00:54](#)):

Oh. So yeah. And it's been amazing to reconnect with you over the last few years and see the work that you are doing. And it's interesting how kind of similar our paths have been in the end, really, and, and the kind of support we offer. But what you do is, it's unique and it's much needed, and it's something that isn't talked about too much. And it's but I think we really need to because it's a natural and, you know, inevitable part of life grief and everything that surrounds it. So, shall we start with a little intro to you and who you are and what your story is and what brought you to this place of supporting people through grief?

Nicola ([01:35](#)):

Yeah, thank you, Sarah. Oh gosh. I always like hesitate in terms of where to start. Kind of, let's start with the labels, I suppose. Like, you know, I'm a registered nutritional therapist and maturation coach, executive coach, writer, and speaker. Those are the labels. But I think what gives kind of more context to that, like you say, is what brought me here. So I specialize in helping and supporting people through grief and, you know, difficult life transitions. And I talk about when life brings you to your needs. And many of us go through those moments in life where it does, it just brings us to our knees. And I went through that just over 15 years ago. I went through a period of quite quick succession, you know, two bereavements. My mother-in-law died, a year later my mom died. And then my marriage broke down. And so everything that I kind of knew, the two most fundamental relationships in my life with my mother and my husband, everything just kind of fell apart. And it was hard. I

don't even think hard does it justice, the grief, you know, I was just broken. My heart just broke in two. I remember, I can still remember the physical pain of heartbreak when my mom died. And so that's really my own journey of grief and life. Bringing me to my knees has brought me here today. And I want to say upfront, I don't believe in the, everything happens for a reason. I just, I think that's a way of what's the word I'm looking for? That's kind of distracting from what the truth of the matter or trying to make people feel better because that's what we try and do. We try and make people feel better, particularly through grief and grief at its steps, there is no feeling better. There is no feeling better. There is no fix. It's a process. And in my experience, I'm 15 years from a specific grief that I went through. In my experience, it stays with you in different ways. And so I believe, you know, grief is not just, when we're bereaved. We feel grief. We just don't talk about it. There are endings in every, moment of our life, even the day ending, even the summer holidays coming to an end or a holiday coming to an end. They're endings. And grief is really appropriate, not just for endings, but as we were talking about before, for the things that we thought we might have. For the way we thought life would look like. And then it doesn't.

Sarah ([05:11](#)):

I like what you said there, Nicola, about grief being appropriate, you know, and there is no quick fix and it needs to be, and you need to just transition through it. And you know, the work that I do with EFT, which is called emotional freedom technique. So essentially to help us be free of the negative or perceived negative emotions, the things that we don't need. And when I talk to my clients, when I first start working with them, and I want to explain how EFT works, I always mention that, you know, grief is the one emotional state that we can't just switch off. And that no amount of tapping will just end your grief because grief is there for a reason in it's a process. Yeah. That needs to be honoured and needs to be worked through. But however, you know, my techniques, your techniques, your support, it, it helps people to make that transition. I'm thinking, you know, and to, to go through that as smoothly as possible and not to feel stuck at any one point longer than is needed, I guess. But yeah, it's an appropriate natural process that we all experience, but doesn't make it any easier to experience just, you know, even though it's commonplace.

Nicola ([06:27](#)):

It really doesn't make it any easier. And it's not linear. I think that's the thing about grief. There's so many kind of subtleties to grief. You know, anger's a common part of grief that isn't widely spoken about because we kind of think about grief and we automatically think about sadness, but we don't think about all the other things that come into it. Mainly a big one is anger, but it's anger and it's sadness. And it can be, it can even be guilt and shame depending on what type of grief you are going through. You know, you can feel Yeah. Guilt and shame in your grief if you know you're not feeling a certain way one day, you know, and my mind's going to Sarah thinking about it in terms of the fertility journey, and maybe you can bring that to life. But for instance, for me, in my experience, you know, when I had good days after my mom had died, it was like, oh, the guilt and shame that came in because, oh, I shouldn't be feeling like this. Or, you know, or the fear that I might forget her. And that's specific, that's quite specific to kind of losing someone you love, but there'll be something like that around fertility as well. So there's all sorts of, the landscape for grief is vast. Is really vast.

Sarah ([08:08](#)):

Vast and very varied for sure. I mean, in terms of fertility, I see it often in kind of two broad areas. You know, you, you could say the kind of more expected grief of an actual loss of a pregnancy, of a baby at any stage of pregnancy or, or shortly after birth or whenever that sadly happens. But within the fertility journey, especially when it involves fertility treatment like IVF, you have the potential loss of, of that hope and expectation of that cycle. You know, that potential, you invested all this time and money and energy and hope into one month and one attempt. And then if there are no eggs collected, if there are no healthy embryos

created, or the one embryo that was transferred doesn't take, and there is no pregnancy, then there's absolutely a grief and a loss around those areas. And I think that up to a point is kind of, I'd say accepted by most people, although some people will still say, Well, you never met the baby, so how could you grieve them? I think people who have been, I don't know, generally, people who've been pregnant will understand that connection that you have from day one and that desire and that connection you have to your baby. But also there is that, that kind of more expansive and you could say a long term grief of every day that you are, you are not yet pregnant every day that you haven't yet met your baby. And when you talked about them just having those moments of happiness when you were still in the grieving process and then feeling guilty, I think that can strike as well of, you know, it's, well, I've been trying for my baby for 3, 4, 5 years, however long and, you know, life does need to happen alongside the trying for a baby. But it can be very hard to do that when it's so all-encompassing and it takes over every part of your life and it's about something that isn't yet there, you know, So it is that feeling of emptiness and of loss and grief. And it's hard to know how to live alongside that often.

Nicola ([10:17](#)):

And that's, that's the vastness of it, isn't it? There's so many different layers of loss, the grief for the life or how you thought it should be, you know, the fairy tale that we talk about and all those different elements of loss. And, and you know, as you were speaking, you know, particularly about the IVF, it's like how much the body goes through in to even go through a cycle of IVF that takes a lot. And then, like you say, the grief after that, it's a lot.

Sarah ([11:00](#)):

It is. It really is. And people are often recommended by their clinic even, you know, to take a month or more break in between cycles, maybe looking it from a physical perspective to let your body, you know, get the hormones out the system and, and rebalance before you try again. And emotionally yeah. People often do need that break, but at the same time they've also perhaps thinking of their age and they're thinking, I don't want to wait many more months because, you know, I have this awareness that perhaps my, you know, egg count is lessening and I want to have the best possible chance with working next time. So there often isn't a lot of space to grieve, you know? And when people come to me and ask for support, I sometimes feel we're supporting them, you know, in kind of, oh, I don't want to say speeding up the grief process, but it almost feels that way. It's like, well, I've got to kind of recover from that loss so I can put myself out there and be vulnerable and try and get pregnant again.

Nicola ([12:00](#)):

Try again. Yeah. You know, what comes to me is, as you are speaking is what I often talk about is permission to feel. Because no matter what, you know, the, these experiences that we go through like this, they're deep. And we don't often give ourselves permission to feel permission to feel the grief, permission to feel the anger. You said it earlier, like they're perceived negative emotions. And we don't give ourselves permission to feel, let alone dare to ask for support or voice it to those we love. And sometimes I think even just that permission to feel is such a gift, you know, in what you do. Because you know, most of the time we are surrounded by very well-meaning loved ones, but they don't know how to even hold how they feel, let alone to hold how you feel. And sometimes you just need a space where you are allowed to feel, where you are allowed to voice everything. All the thoughts that we judge as wrong or negative. To voice all those things. You know, I want to give up. I, whatever it is, I feel like a failure. You know, I remembered distinctly when my marriage broke down, you know, I felt like such a failure. And yet, you know, at that time I kept everything in and I think just permission to say exactly what's there for you, permission to feel what's there for you that you don't need to keep all these things in. And actually, what I see, and I don't know whether you see this too, but what I see is once you hold that space just to witness where somebody is, it moves, it really does move to, like you said, to enable them to go into the next round. It's like, oh, something is just, I'm no longer putting that lid on

it. Because we, particularly in this society, we feel we have to be positive. You know, just get on with it, you know, and, no, just, no, I want to say no to that way of being in the world anymore. Let's break that down.

Sarah ([15:03](#)):

Yeah, definitely. Because the more we put the lid on it, we try and neatly, you know, put our emotions in a box and push them away and pretend they don't exist and, and get on and plaster that smile on our face. It's like they're, they're just going to get louder and more urgently trying to get your attention. And what I find in on the fertility journey as well is that it just takes that little vulnerable moment. You know, the next time someone announces that they're pregnant and it reminds you that you are not there yet. The next time you see a negative pregnancy test result or something, and suddenly it's just like that, the lid like bursts open and everything just comes out again, it can be quite overwhelming because you feel like you've handled it, you feel like I've, I've compartmentalised that I've put it away. But if it is still there and it hasn't had time to be processed and heard. It's just waiting. And I think as women, you know, prepare for pregnancy, which you hope that's in their future, and they will eventually be pregnant, have their baby, that's also a very vulnerable time, isn't it? When you are feeling so protective of, of that little one that you're carrying and then you are taking care of. And I think unresolved grief on a fertility journey can show itself up during pregnancy, after birth, or at any point, you know, further down the road.

Nicola ([16:20](#)):

Yeah. I was in a group just last night actually with Francis Weller. Francis Weller is a psychologist in the States, and he wrote the beautiful, beautiful book called *The Wild Edge of Sorrow* is kind of my manual of grief. And it's so beautiful that I just kind of, it's usually with me. I've shown you it, Sarah, I know people can't see this, but it's, it's literally right by my side as, as I'm talking now. And he talks about when we are going through these moments of our lives, he talks about them as initiation of the soul. Now that kind of goes quite deep. I think we're used to talking about souls in a different way that it is kind of spiritual and out there. But he talks about initiations of the soul, which means, you know, exactly what I spoke about earlier about bringing you to your knees. But he talks about, how did he put it. Like suspended grief, which is like, might have gone some part, but we may never have fully I can't think of another word, but this isn't quite right, but fully processed or fully allowed ourselves to feel. And when he said that last night really hit me, I thought, I wonder how many of us are living in this suspension between something that we've experienced in our life and we've just kind of got on with it. That there's still stuff there, you know? That's just there. And that's what it reminded me of, you know, when you said, you know, just that the negative pregnancy test or you hear someone's pregnant and then whoosh, it all comes up again and that's a grief that those are the waves of grief that come and they can just, sometimes they're more gentle, but sometimes, gosh, they can come and they can wipe you out. Completely wipe you out.

Sarah ([18:41](#)):

Yeah. And it can be shocking, can't it, as well? If you don't see it coming. Whereas if you've learned that about yourself and you understand what's happening, I'm guessing that's a big part of it, is it, to really understand and accept the grief that we have?

Nicola ([18:58](#)):

I think grief is so raw. I think it's so deep that I think sometimes we can understand it. But I think we've been conditioned so much to be positive that actually really allowing ourselves to be with the grief in our hearts and our bodies, it's really hard. And what I would say is it takes practice. It takes a different way of being with yourself in the world. It takes compassion to just say to yourself, It's okay that I feel this way today. I'm allowed to feel this way today. You know, take away all the judgments, all of what anybody else might think. It's okay that I'm here today. You know, I think some of it goes back, Sarah, to this fairy-tale that we think we

should be happy all the time. And life just isn't like that. And I think that's where the acceptance comes in that you speak about is like, when we accept that life is, life's a bumpy road, doesn't mean it's not beautiful, but it's both of those things. You know, we talk black and you know, black or white, right or wrong, but actually, it's beautiful and it can bring us to our knees. We can feel grief and we can have a happiness in our hearts at the same time. But we are so used to it labelling and it being one thing or another. And if we feel grief, then there's something wrong with me. If I feel anger there's something wrong with me. And no, it's not, goes back to what we were saying, it's appropriate. It's really appropriate. You know, you layer on what we've been through in the last few years, the pandemic, the cost of living rises we're in now, you know, it's appropriate that every single human being on this planet right now is feeling a level of grief, really, really appropriate. But most of us, and this isn't with any judgement, this is our coping mechanism, This is how we survive. This is what we all do. You know, we try and bury it. And I think what I was trying to say earlier is like, I want to bring this out in the open. Let's really talk about how we really feel.

Sarah ([21:41](#)):

Which is why you are here, Nicola. Why I invited you and why I'm hoping lots of people are listening because it's hearing these conversations, isn't it giving that permission to sit by ourselves or read a book or, you know, try and kind of create that process ourselves. But there's something about hearing others speak. And being a part of that conversation, being in a community of others who really understand.

Nicola ([22:06](#)):

Yeah. And that's why I love the community that you've created, because I think this is another important element. Community. You know, there was a time, and I'm going to quote Francis again, but you know, this is one of the things Francis talks about a lot is that when you are going through it, through this, you would have that community. And we don't, So we feel the grief, the loss of community that we'd have like nowhere to go. But actually, you know, when I hold the grief circles that I hold can be quite difficult to get people there. But when they do come, oh my gosh. And we sit together and it is so amazing. I sometimes come away and I kind of can't quite believe it because we sit there and we talk about our grief and, and you know, what it opens up is, I think it opens the heart up because A, you realise you're not alone. That everybody in this world is going through something or has experienced something. And somehow in talking and crying, sometimes screaming and getting that anger out, you know, I remember the last one I led and we were all like, hugging and laughing as we all walked out. Something had moved and we were smiling and life just felt a little bit better somehow.

Sarah ([23:53](#)):

You underestimate the power of that and you don't, you say something happened, it's strange. You can't kind of. Measure or even identify exactly what it was. But yeah, when you bring people together that have a common understanding and experience. Like grief and, and they're allowed to, and they give themselves permission, you know, just to share. And they feel in a safe space to do that. It is something quite magical that happens. And it's not tangible. We don't always understand why. It's that human need, isn't it, for connection? And support in that, that maybe direct way.

Nicola ([24:27](#)):

And that community, you know, we are so isolated. We're so isolated. We think that we have to do everything on our own. And it's really, I think it's really detrimental, you know, even I mean, I've had to ask for help these last couple of days just with childcare and things like that. You know, nothing major. But even that kind of asking for help. Yeah. It gets so, I mean, it's literally stuck in me and I'm quite good at these things now, but I was like, well, can I really ask for help? You know? And we have to, we have to, One of my teachers says only I alone can do this, but I cannot do it alone.

Sarah ([25:26](#)):

I like that.

Nicola ([25:27](#)):

Yeah.

Sarah ([25:28](#)):

Yeah. Wonderful. And I think you touched on earlier about a sense of failure, didn't you? That can be felt. And if we feel that they're not living up to our own expectations or society's expectations, this feeling of failure comes in like we've done something wrong. And that's definitely something that's felt on a fertility journey. And people go back to a time in their life that this feels familiar. They failed again because they haven't achieved motherhood yet. And yeah, when we are, we are feeling that burden on ourselves that we're not doing this right, in whatever way it's very hard to, to sit with people and share, isn't it? And that's, it sounds like your grief circles are very special places. And I know, I forget what it was called now. Is it moments of stillness?

Nicola ([26:12](#)):

Yeah. It was one of my free sessions, wasn't it?

Sarah ([26:16](#)):

Yeah, and for whatever reason, your email came through. I thought I need to be there. And you were the only face that I knew there, you know, Zoom session. And I'd never met anyone else, but it was so lovely just to be among people with that common intention and listening to the lovely support and the meditation you took us through and so on. And I see the same in my support circles, in my membership, my fertile mindset sanctuary as I really, well, the membership as a whole in the group, in the circles, I encourage that sharing of the emotions and that there will be no judgment, there will be no trying to, you know, have all those platitudes of it happens for a reason and all of that. Oh, think on the bright, you know, think about what you've got. You know, we need to, we need to allow the emotions in a, in order to, to work with them and through them and beyond. And it is lovely on the support circles. And people do share really raw emotion, you know? No one's met in person, we're on Zoom together. But they feel that connection because these are other women who understand what it means not to have your baby yet in whatever circumstance, whatever story. They've got that thread of connection and understanding. And nothing needs to be explained. You know, this is, they all understand. So it's, it's wonderful to see the support that comes forward from one person sharing and how others will then share their experiences too.

Nicola ([27:41](#)):

It is really such a beautiful gift when you sit in circle or however it is. And that moment when you realize you are not alone. You know, I do some work for a breast cancer charity and, you know, sitting with women who have cancer. And again, it's amazing how beautiful it is just to bring people together and when they're together, something happens, something really happens. And I don't think we should underestimate that at all.

Sarah ([28:24](#)):

Thank you for being here today, Nicola, because you have added to the community right now. And you know, with this lovely conversation. And I hope that those listening, I hope that you have some comfort in listening to these words and knowing that you are absolutely not alone. Even if physically sometimes you feel you are alone and you don't have people close to you who understand your own experience of grief. That there are many people who do understand and through what I often think of as the magic of the internet, you know, we can

find those people, can't we? We can find those who understand, who can be our own circles, our own communities, or just that one-to-one space, whatever we need.

Nicola ([29:06](#)):

And it's amazing how sometimes, like you say, an email can pop in or something. And what I would say is, you know, sometimes it takes a little bit of courage to make that step to go along. I know the courage it takes for the people that come to my grief circles. I know that it takes courage. But then something can open up. And I think, I think if I were to end on one thing, it's, it is that you are allowed to feel whatever you feel. You're allowed to feel, give yourself permission to feel it all, to get angry, to get annoyed. Yeah. Feel it all.

Sarah ([29:52](#)):

Thank you, Nicola. That's lovely. Thank you. Could you please share also how people can keep in touch with you and receive those lovely emails and those nudges? Where can we find you?

Nicola ([30:02](#)):

You can find me. So my website is <https://www.nicoladuffell.com/>. And there's the sign-up to my newsletter there. And the reason I mention my newsletter, I know that people are inundated with emails, but I just love writing my letters to you, that there's a place where I pour out most of my heart and I share videos and things like that. So if your inbox can bear it, that my newsletters are there. And then my other kind of home, I suppose is Instagram, and I'm Nicola Duffell on Instagram. I'm still finding my way. I think my relationship with social media and kind of goes up and down and changes. But Instagram is where I spend most of my time there. And I often do you know, free lives and I often do free sessions as you, as you mentioned Sarah. So if you follow me, you'll see kind of all the stuff that I'm doing.

Sarah ([31:12](#)):

I'd recommend both. I'm a keen follower of both. I hope you don't mind me sharing this, but when you mentioned about the newsletter I really love receiving your newsletters. And you're right, they're a letter, they're a real letter, a written letter, not, not an email with a few points. You know, it's a heart-to-heart communication. And I know that you shared with me, I'm not going to give out any figures or anything, so I can't remember them anyway. But I remember you shared with me when we had a little bit of a chat about business and emails and marketing and all that kind of thing. And you said that you have a really high percentage of people that open your emails. Which is very unusual. You know, most emails get deleted before they've opened because we're all so busy and our inboxes are so full, but yours get read and they get read for a reason. And I'm really pleased that that's happening.

Nicola ([31:56](#)):

Thank you. Honestly, I think if I could literally write a hand letter to everybody. Because I just love writing both like literally with words, but also physically with a pen and paper. I think if I could write a hand letter to everybody, I probably would do that as well. So thank you for saying that. I really appreciate it.

Sarah ([32:20](#)):

Beautiful. Thank you, Nicola. Lovely to chat with you again. As always.

Nicola ([32:24](#)):

Thank you.

I'm so pleased you're listening to the Fertile Mindset Podcast, and now I would love to invite you to join us in the Fertile Mindset Sanctuary. The Sanctuary is my fertility support

membership which is focused on taking care of you and helping you enjoy life while you wait for your baby. In the Sanctuary I'll guide you through using an amazing technique called EFT or Tapping, and you'll soon be feeling less stressed and more joyful! If you're not already in the Sanctuary, do come and join us today, because the best time to start receiving support on your fertility journey is always right now. Honestly, it makes such a difference to have good quality emotional support and techniques that you can pick up and use yourself whenever you need them.

Go to www.fertilemindset.com/Sanctuary to join us today. I look forward to hopefully seeing you there, and at the next episode of the Fertile Mindset Podcast!