

# Emotional Support for Clients Experiencing Infertility

Infertility and family-building challenges can cause clients emotional distress and feelings of shame, grief, and loss, which can result in depression and anxiety. This job aid guides staff in counseling clients experiencing infertility.



**When counseling a client experiencing infertility:**

## DO provide client-centered support.

- Learn and affirm your client's family-building goals to provide client-centered care for all.
- Establish trust. Show your interest. Focus only on your client when talking with them about their infertility. Look them in the eye, and listen without multitasking.



What questions  
do you have?

Tell me about your  
experience so far.

- Acknowledge that many clients experience emotional distress when navigating infertility and family-building pathways and treatment. Discuss how feelings of grief and shame can result in depression and anxiety. Emphasize that help is readily available.



Stress does not cause  
infertility, but the challenges  
of infertility can absolutely  
cause stress.

Experiencing infertility, and  
challenges in building your family,  
can be extremely hard. Some people  
experience depression and anxiety.

Please know that there is support  
available, and we can help.

- Ask your client if they would like to discuss their mental health and well-being, and how you can help.



How have you been doing?

I want you to know that  
you are not alone,  
and that there are  
options for support.

How can I support you  
during this time?

- Offer mental health and support services, such as: additional assessment, treatment, or counseling; and social, emotional, or spiritual support services. Offer referral to a therapist who has experience with clients struggling with infertility.

- Ask the client if and how they would like to involve their partner in discussions and care, if relevant. Infertility can affect relationships. While in some cases it brings people closer together, it can also cause stress, tension, and conflict. Partners may experience financial stress, a strain on intimacy, lack of communication, and differences in decisions and coping strategies.
- Offer quality, client-centered educational materials and resources about infertility, infertility treatment, and fertility assistance.
- Be informed about your client's options and potential next steps in evaluation and treatment. Support your client in pursuing the path that feels right for them.

## **DON'T cause harm by using statements that may feel insensitive, invalidating, and/or triggering to your client.**

- Don't tell your client to "relax."** This can come across as judgmental and minimizes your client's experience.
- Don't highlight the supposed "upsides" of not having a child.** Avoid comments such as, "Just enjoy being able to sleep in right now," or "Trust me, parenting is not all it's cracked up to be."
- Don't tell your client that "it will happen."** There is no guarantee that this is true, and your client knows this. Such reassurances can feel dismissive.
- Don't use humor or be too casual to lighten the atmosphere.**
- Don't push adoption or other options.** Your client needs to process many considerations before they'll be ready to decide next steps in their family-building journey. Clients need the space to decide what feels right for them. This includes whether or not to continue treatment and/or to explore other options to grow their family.

**Infertility** is the result of a disease of the male or female reproductive tract which prevents the conception of a child or the ability to carry a pregnancy to delivery.



## **REFERENCES**

- 1 [American Society for Reproductive Medicine. Micro-video: Decreasing the Emotional Burden of Care.](#)
- 2 [American Society for Reproductive Medicine. FAQs About Infertility.](#)

This publication was supported by the Office on Women's Health (Grant ASTWH200090). The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the official policies of the Department of Health and Human Services; nor does mention of trade names, commercial practices, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.