

## **Find the right words ... or none at all**

by Tina Smith

Chances are you'll eventually cross paths with a woman struggling with infertility. Maybe you've already met her or just know of her plight through the grapevine. Maybe you're dreading the first encounter with her, not knowing what to do or say.

Consider these suggestions when reaching out to those who continue to be eluded by the dream of motherhood:

***Don't say anything – just listen.*** Most likely, there's nothing remarkably profound that you can offer to ease her pain. Babbling on may cause her to retreat right back into the shell of protection she puts around herself to avoid sharing such a personal and misunderstood issue. Ask her what's causing the most frustration and then let her talk. Focus on her, nod your head and give her a much-needed chance to vent.

***Don't pretend to know how she feels.*** Unless you've experienced infertility, it's best to just say you have no idea what she's feeling. Tell her you can only imagine what it would be like to face the possibility of not having any children. Ask her if there's any thing you can do to help ease her stress or show your support.

***Don't try to offer a solution.*** If an answer is out there, she's already turned her life upside down to find it. She doesn't need you to tell her what to do. She needs to believe that she's not crazy for going down an uncertain or unconventional path to achieve what seems to come so easy for everyone else. She needs someone she can trust who doesn't judge her. She needs friendship.

***Don't minimize her pain.*** Comments like "it will all work out" or "you'll have a baby when God wants you to" are not appropriate. Her struggle is real and all-consuming to her. The journey through infertility is threatening to overwhelm her. Ask her if a little distraction would be helpful. Offer to meet her out for dinner some evening or catch the latest chick-flick at the theater. Loan her a book that you couldn't put down. Bring her a batch of your homemade cookies. Let her know that you are just a phone call away if she needs to talk.

***Don't betray her confidences.*** Keep quiet about the details she shares with you. If others ask, recommend that they seek her out and offer friendship and a listening ear.

Already emotional by nature, a infertile woman may be dealing with hormone surges and other side effects from treatments. She can burst into tears without warning or distance herself from those around her just to make it through a particularly difficult day. Your compassion and patience will go a long way in helping her survive the uncertain weeks ahead.

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