



How to Respect when They are Not Expecting

Rabbi Amy Idit Solomon

The situation seems obvious. They always talked about having children, yet three years of marriage brought no babies. She was pregnant last year, but it ended in loss. Infertility and other family building challenges are quite common yet hardly ever discussed. When these situations happen to someone you love, what can you do to help?

Finding the balance of respecting privacy, breaking isolation and showing support can be a challenge. The best place to start is by checking assumptions and asking yourself these questions:

1) Is it your business?

If you are not sure how to answer that question, consider this: How close am I to this person? Do I talk about personal issues with them? Do we have a level of trust? Is this a context that invites such a conversation?

We all want what's best for our loved ones, especially if we know that having a family is a goal of theirs. However, being a relative or acquaintance does not entitle anyone to intimacy or information.

2) What are you hoping to accomplish?

Curiosity is not a good enough reason to intervene because it is about your interest - not helping the other person. Related questions to consider: What do you know about her/his/their plans or attempts to have a baby? Do you have an opinion on what they ought to be doing? What is your motivation for getting involved?

Sadly, you cannot make a baby for someone. Nor can you force someone to give up, move-on, seek treatment, lighten up or keep trying. It's also unlikely that you can change his/her desire to have or not have a child. People figure this out in their own time in their own way. Are you most interested to share your opinion? Don't do it. In these circumstances, what is usually more appreciated is your care for their well-being.

3) What can you offer?

You cannot force help upon anyone. Infertility can be isolating and painful. Some people do not want to open up, impose on others, or appear weak. However, if you are truly prepared to give and flexible about when, here are some ideas of what you can offer:

- Distractions – Offer a movie, massage, lunch or whatever you would normally do. Keep offering it. Time together is invaluable.



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- Your involvement – you can help find support groups, learn together, give a ride to an appointment, etc.
- Understanding – Learn for yourself. Do you know what IVF, ICSI, PGS vs PGD, PCOS, IUI or TTC mean? Look them up. When someone doesn't have to explain their diagnosis, you can spend more time focused on them.
- An ear – Listen - **without giving advice**. Reflect on what you hear. Or offer a set time for them to unload and then you can just be present.

4) What can you do?

You can help someone to feel less isolated, understand themselves. And nurture a sense of wholeness. What could that look like?

- Email or text to stay connected. This gives them the space to answer when it is comfortable for them. If someone is struggling, bringing up the topic may feel more like an ambush than support. So take advantage of technology.
- Tell them you care. Say something like, "I'm sorry this is happening to you. It makes me sad and angry at times. I hate that you are going through this. You don't deserve this. I care about you no matter what happens and I just want you to know that."
- If someone does share and asks what to do or says something like, "I don't know what to do," resist answering with advice. Each person has their own boundaries and priorities. You can help them consider these as they move forward by suggesting they think about how many months/treatments/dollars/medications is their limit? Is there only one way for them to become a parent? Where in this process is their marriage, mental health, social life, finances, etc? Help someone find their own way and support their decisions.
- Follow up on all of those offers listed above. Offer again for as long as they let you!

The most important ways to show respect include knowing your place, putting their interests in focus, staying connected and supporting them as they find what is important for them. May you be a source of strength and may those facing infertility and other family building challenges be strengthened!