

Longing for the blue line

Trying for a baby is an exciting process, but it can be fraught with difficulties, especially if things take longer than you hoped they would.

Sarah Abell shares the up and downs of her challenging journey into motherhood, and some of the valuable lessons she learned along the way.

I remember one day catching sight of a photo of a mother crocodile with a dozen babies. "How come she has all those, and I don't have one?" I asked my husband David, tears pouring down my cheeks. Yet another pregnancy test had failed to reveal a blue line.

My hormones at the time were playing havoc with my emotions. We had been trying to conceive for five years and had experienced one miscarriage about two years in. There were days when I wasn't sure it would ever happen.

So you can imagine how grateful we were when, after three rounds of fertility treatment and a difficult pregnancy, our son Jed was born.

But when he was about a year old, the questions started. I was amazed at how many people wanted to know if and when I was going to provide him with a sibling. Perhaps those who asked were just showing an interest, but on those days when I was feeling low, I would wonder whether their seemingly innocent question was just another way of asking, "Are you and your husband having enough sex? Do your ovaries still work? Can you cope with any more children at your age?"

The truth is, I used to be as guilty as the next person when it came to asking about baby plans. Most of us are probably just curious, but do we stop to think that the friend or acquaintance in question might not want to tell us that they are pregnant, trying for a baby or struggling with infertility? Surely if they did, they would have mentioned something. Our probing forces them to lie, fob us off with a polite but non-committal answer, or reluctantly reveal the truth.

My own response would vary depending on my mood and who was doing the asking. Normally I managed to mutter something like, "Yes, more would be nice." But if I was

feeling braver I would be more open about our struggles.

These days, I try hard to avoid asking anyone directly about baby plans. If I sense someone might want or need to talk about it, I find it better to bring up the topic generally or to share something of my own experiences. Doing that allows the other person to decide whether they want to discuss their situation with me or not.

After Jed's arrival, we did try a couple more rounds of fertility treatment, but a sibling never came. Now, as I'm nearly 46 years old, it is increasingly unlikely that we'll have more, especially because we have chosen not to undergo any more treatment. Instead, I have learned to focus on what I have, and not on what I don't.

If you or someone you know is struggling to conceive at the moment, I would love to share a few things I found helpful:

1. Nurture your relationship

David and I realised that going through challenges could pull us apart or bring us together, and were determined it would be the latter. We made sure we communicated our fears, hopes and dreams with each other. We tried hard to keep our sense of humour and to find ways to have fun together. We found other couples who had been through similar situations, who we could look to for support and encouragement. You can hear more about our story and how we helped each other get through this time on episode four of *The Marriage Challenge*.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=VmilaPthWyw

2. Carefully consider your options

We found it really helpful to consider our options together. Your GP or your local fertility clinic should be able to explain what is available to you. If you are considering fertility treatment, you might want to think about which ones you would be prepared to try and how much budget you have to spend. If you can't get it on the NHS, fertility treatment can be very costly, so it's worth discussing how much you can afford and when you will draw the line. Do this before



you start; it can be harder to know when to stop once you are in the process and feeling emotionally involved. Also think about whether you would consider adoption. You can find more help and resources about this option at www.homeforgood.org.uk.

3. Create a network of support

When I had my miscarriage, I was amazed at how many friends told me about their own experiences. It was such a relief to realise I wasn't alone and that others knew what I was going through. Facing fertility issues can be very challenging and it can really help to find trusted and supportive friends to share the journey with. My husband and I had a small group who committed to pray with us and for us, which was a great encouragement.

4. Think through your responses

I remember one friend telling me that she and her husband decided that they would not discuss with anyone which one of them had the issue that meant they couldn't conceive. They would talk about it in terms of "we" instead. It's worth thinking through what you will tell people if and when they ask about any baby plans, and agree your responses together.

5. Focus on the present

One of the biggest challenges for us was to try not to become so fixated on having a baby (or a second one) that we lost sight of what we already had. It won't always be easy but try to focus on and enjoy the present. If you already have a child, make sure that you enjoy each precious moment - it's too easy to become so preoccupied with creating a sibling that you miss what is right in front of you. I now know that I will only have one chance at parenting, which is a great focus for me. I remind myself daily to be thankful for each and every moment with Jed, as I know having him is an amazing gift.

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