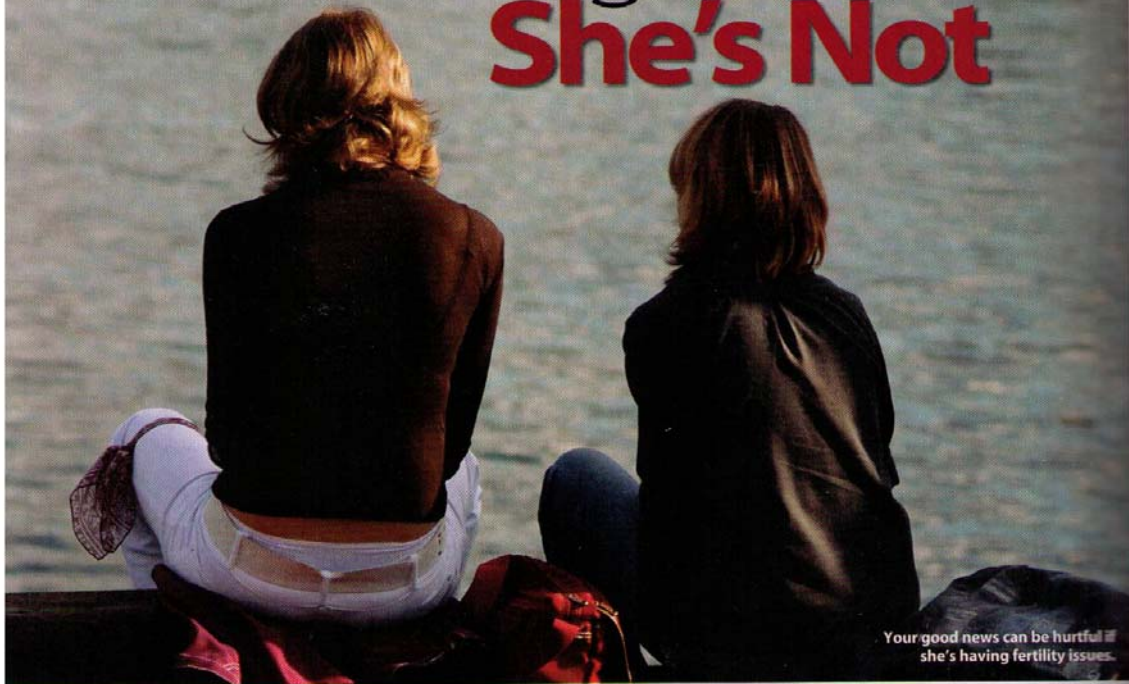


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You're Pregnant, She's Not



Your good news can be hurtful if she's having fertility issues.

How to share your pregnancy with a friend who's having trouble conceiving

BY JEANNE MUCHNICK

Aliza Sherman Risdahl, of Anchorage, AK, and Jo McGuire, of Ft. Collins, CO, have been good friends since they worked together six years ago in Wyoming. When jobs forced them both to move, they continued to email daily and talk every other day. According to both, they are great friends, best friends even. Yet Risdahl admits that when McGuire became pregnant, the two avoided the topic altogether.

That's because McGuire got pregnant about two months after her wedding, while Risdahl had been through four miscarriages and was still trying to conceive. "My emotions were pretty raw,"

she admits. "It was really painful to hear about Jo's pregnancy, especially since she got pregnant right away while I had been trying to conceive for years." On the other hand, Risdahl says it bothered her that McGuire was "extra cautious" with her when discussing her pregnancy.

It's understandable: When you announce your news to a friend who's experiencing infertility, it feels to her like a punch in the stomach. As your friend, of course she's happy for you, and she'd be hurt if you didn't share the news. But she can't help feeling sad for herself, says Brette McWhorter Sember, the author of *The Infertility Answer Book*, and a mom

of two who struggled with conceiving. Having been on both sides of the fence, Sember knows there are no easy answers or "right" things to say. Which is why, no matter how tickled pink (or blue!) you are, you'll want to be careful divulging your news to a friend having difficulty getting pregnant. Some tips:

Be considerate when you tell her. According to Sember, it's best to come right out and say, "I'm pregnant," with a smile. "If you're purposefully too casual about the news or try to downplay it, it will make your friend feel her situation has dampened your enthusiasm for your own."

Avoid certain phrases. Don't say things like "I don't expect you to be happy for me" or "I'm sorry to have to tell you this," then in the same breath, "Your turn will come" or "I know you'll be next." These statements don't offer a lot of comfort to someone who is trying to have a baby. Andrea Nezin of Tucson, AZ, says she appreciated it when a friend said to her: "I wanted to tell you personally that I'm expecting because I know that my news may make you feel a little sad right now, and I understand that. But I hope that your pregnancy is going to happen soon."

Let go of expectations about how your friend will react. She may feel joy—or anger and abandonment, advises April Masini, author of AskApril.com, an online relationship magazine. Many people who cannot conceive find it painful to be around pregnant women because it reminds them of their own disappointment. Don't get angry with your friend if she lashes out or needs space from you. Listen, be understanding and empathetic, and don't act defensive. Later, write a short note explaining that you're sorry for her pain and that you're there for her whenever she is ready to be with you, in whatever capacity she can be.

Give her time to process and respond. Initial reactions might not

be how she really feels. Risdahl says she remembers telling McGuire how thrilled she was, but then she hung up the phone and started to sob. For Trina Read of Calgary, Alberta, it took a full month to process two friends' pregnancy announcements. They had each told her a few weeks after one of her five miscarriages, and she was too devastated and absorbed in her own emotions to talk to them. When she finally got together with them, she told them how jealous she was. "We acted like 'girls,' cried and hugged and talked about it for at least half an hour," Read says. "And because we talked it through and got all the emotions out, it was no longer an issue. We have moved on and are better friends for the experience."

Don't let your pregnancy dominate your conversations with her. You have other friends for that. And while experts say you don't have to hide your excitement, you can ask if there is something you can do, or not do, to accommodate your friend during this time. Ask her how she is dealing with the infertility treatments (if she is having them) and how her marriage is doing under the strain.

Don't feel like you have to walk on eggshells. For the most part, be yourself. Friends know when you're

being extra cautious or too apologetic, and it makes them feel guilty for making you feel that way. To work through her feelings, Risdahl started a blog about her issues with conceiving (babyfruit.typepad.com), even writing about the mixed emotions she felt when McGuire announced she was having a boy. "I was afraid Jo would be upset," Risdahl says. "But she said she understood."

The best thing to do, experts agree, is to try your best to make your friend feel comfortable. "Just because she's having trouble getting pregnant doesn't mean she'll never be a parent," stresses Sember. "Putting her in a separate category labeled 'infertile' is hurtful. She needs you to have faith that she will have a child of her own someday. The best tactic is to assume she will, and let her know you assume that, too."

In the end, Risdahl and McGuire's friendship was back on track even before McGuire had her baby. Then Risdahl had a healthy baby girl. Now, she and McGuire regularly exchange photos, compare notes about motherhood, and are looking forward to their babies becoming friends. ▶

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Should you invite your friend to your BABY SHOWER?

YES. She would be insulted if you didn't. "Not inviting her is rude and it singles out to her that she isn't pregnant and you don't believe she ever will be," warns Sember. However, Sember says it's fine to gently tell her she doesn't need to feel like she has to come and that you would completely understand if she didn't. As for sharing sonogram photos? That depends on the level of your friendship. If she's

a friend you would normally share something like this with, then yes, advises Sember. "It's not your job to protect her—it's your job to be a friend and share things with her. She's going to see babies on the street and pregnant women, and there are reminders everywhere. You can't shield her from the world. And I don't think she would want you to," Sember says.