

You're pregnant, she's not

How to share your pregnancy with a friend who's having trouble conceiving. Yes, it's possible. And yes, you can still be friends.

BY ▶ JEANNE MUCHNICK

aliza Sherman Risdahl, of Anchorage, Alaska, and Jo McGuire, of Ft. Collins, Colo., have been good friends since they worked together five years ago in Wyoming. When jobs forced them both to move, they continued to e-mail daily and talk every other day. According to both

friendship is an understatement. Yet the two are trying their hardest to work through it. Jo admits she tends to hold back information from Aliza, especially the personal details like the fact that she's going through a family-size tub of Tylenol every other day or that she's finally feeling "that flutter feeling" that makes her laugh

tious" with her. "It's weird," she says, "because in the past we didn't hold things back." While the two have been open about their feelings, they each admit they're concerned about the future (Jo is due February 1st) and the divide that will set their friendship on a difference course.

It pretty much goes without saying: when you're experiencing infertility and a friend announces her pregnancy, it feels like a kick in the stomach. Of course you're happy for her, and if she didn't share the news and you found out later, you'd be hurt. On the other hand, you can't help but feel sad for yourself, says Brette McWhorter Sember, the author of *The Infertility Answer Book*, and mom of two who herself struggled with conceiving. As someone who's been on both sides of the fence, Sember says there are no easy answers or "right" things to say.

Infertility is at a record high, and the emotional toll it takes on women and

INVITE HER TO YOUR BABY SHOWER.

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, she 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. 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. If not then no. "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 preg-



Pregnancy doesn't have to come between you and your friend.

nant women, and there are reminders everywhere. You can't shield her from the world. And I don't think she would want you to," she says.

women, they are great friends, best friends even. Yet Aliza admits she doesn't know the exact month Jo is expecting. That's because Jo got pregnant about two months into her marriage, and Aliza, who's been married longer, has had four miscarriages and is still trying to conceive. To say the pregnancy impacts their

and cry on a dime. Instead, she shares those kinds of details with friends who have kids. "I know that the complaints on my end are small and could be hurtful to her – after all, she'd take on permanent heartburn in a minute to carry a baby," says Jo. Aliza, on the other hand, admits it bothers her that Jo tends to be "extra cau-

their partners is as of yet, undocumented. But to "fail" at conception often feels to have failed as a woman -- or as a man. Which is why, no matter how tickled pink (or blue!) you are right now, you need to tread delicate waters with friends having trouble conceiving to continue. Some tips:

BE CONSIDERATE WHEN YOU ANNOUNCE YOUR NEWS.

According to Sember, it's best to come right out and say "I'm pregnant" with a mile. "If you're purposefully too casual about the news or try to downplay it, it will make your friend feel her situation as dampened your enthusiasm for your own." Keep it real. Just don't be over-the-top-effusive in your descriptions. And be sensitive to how your words are received.

BE MINDFUL OF 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." Don't assume she will be negative because that hurts your friendship. In the same breath, don't say "Your turn will come," or "I know you'll be next," because they really don't offer a lot of comfort to someone who is trying to have a baby. Andrea Nezin of Tucson, Ariz., 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 our pregnancy is going to happen soon."

LET GO OF YOUR EXPECTATIONS OF HOW YOUR FRIEND IS GOING TO REACT TO YOUR PREGNANCY.

She may react with joy – or anger and abandonment, says 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 at your friend if she abandons you or lashes out. Be understanding and empathetic. Just listen, and don't act defensive. Later, write a short note explaining that you are sorry for your friend's pain and that you are there for her whenever she is ready to be with you whatever capacity she is able to be.

GIVE HER TIME TO PROCESS AND RESPOND.

Initial reactions might not be how she really feels. Aliza says she

remembers telling Jo how thrilled she was for her, but then she hung up the phone and started to sob. For Trina Read of Calgary, Canada, it took a full month to process the pregnancy news two friends had recently shared. When she finally got together with them – a full month later – she told them how jealous she was. "We acted like 'girls,' cried and hugged and talked for at least half an hour," she 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 CONVERSATION.

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

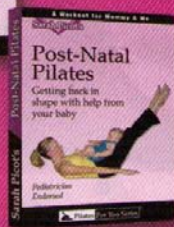
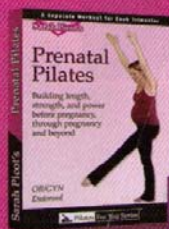
DON'T FEEL YOU HAVE TO WALK ON EGGHELLS ALL THE TIME.

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. Aliza runs a blog about her issues with conceiving. Jo says she reads it religiously but doesn't comment on it; instead she e-mails or calls when she notices a new posting. Aliza even wrote about the mixed emotions she felt when Jo announced she was having a boy. "I was afraid Jo would be upset," she says. "But she said she understood." The bottom line, 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," says Sember. "Putting her in a category labeled 'infertile' is hurtful. She needs you to have faith she will have a child someday. Assume she will, and let her know you assume it." Indeed, Jo says she feels fortunate that Aliza is so supportive. But mostly what she hopes is that her friend will ultimately conceive and the separation between them will disappear. ▶

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