

THE F WORD Fertility & Infertility

Infertility is not only about your physical health, but it can affect your mental health too. It is so important to understand the complexities of fertility and how we can look after, support and help ourselves and others.

This cheat sheet is about how you create the right environment, for people to feel relaxed and confident about chatting to you – whether that's face-to-face or virtually. And what workplaces and managers can do to be aware of and support people going through fertility issues.

Your role in supporting others

IT'S WHAT YOU DO

How you can help, give it a go...

Most people going through fertility treatment are of working age. It's important to know your rights as an employee, and how to provide a supportive work environment as an employer.

The key to supporting people going through fertility issues really is flexibility and understanding.

Men are half of the fertility equation, but may find it harder to express their feelings.

Unfortunately, there are a lack of male voices in this community. To raise awareness, make sure your workplace takes all groups into account when talking about fertility: male, female and LGBTQ+.

Being open and available

To do this well, you need to be mentally present and non-judgmental. Fertility impacts people in different ways. Everyone has a different story and a diverse fertility journey.

Being mentally present and available means giving your full attention and being open to hearing in a non-judgemental way. Remember! When listening with empathy, you are not trying to solve the issue or lead them to an answer.

DO

- ✓ Check-in and ask if there is anything that will help
- ✓ Make sure they know they can go to you or someone else
- ✓ Be sensitive. Everyone is in a different situation
- ✓ Be flexible with meetings, working hours and if a phone call needs to be made

Creating the right environment

Research shows that most people suffering from infertility are reluctant to speak to their employer about it, because they fear doing so will detrimentally affect their career.

Letting people know they can have time off if they need to, without the fear of being judged, pitied or gossiped about, is important. If they can't make a meeting, knowing that someone else will handle things will help. As will being able to take part in conference calls from home, if treatment is going on.

DON'T

- X Offer suggestions such as: 'Have you thought about adopting?'
- X Put your own judgements on them, about their age or other presumptions about their situation
- X Ask questions that may cause embarrassment
- X Think you have to have answers; listening is sometimes enough

Find out what's involved: Women having treatment typically require around six to eight flexible days. This includes appointments for a variety of tests, egg collection and transfer, multiple ultrasound scans and consultations. Men may need to attend tests too and support their partner, as will same sex couples. During a working day, women need to inject fertility drugs which, typically, require refrigeration. Or they may need to insert progesterone pessaries up to three times a day, which come with instructions to lie down for 30 minutes after insertion. As a workplace, be aware of these complexities and think how they can be supported.

Be open and listen with empathy. Ask people: 'How are you? Is there anything I can support you with that I'm not doing?' Listen for feedback and act on it.

Phrases such as: 'I understand that must be tough' and nodding show empathy. You might even try rephrasing back to them. 'So you feel anxious? Is there anything I can do to help?'