

How Couples Cope with Infertility¹

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I've had many friends who, soon after they were married, were constantly facing questions from friends and relatives about when they were going to start having children. Many people assume this would be the next logical step. However, many couples choose not to have children, and more than four million married men and women in the U.S. have difficulty conceiving or carrying a child to birth.

While researchers have long studied infertility and its causes, not as much attention has been given to how it impacts couples. However, in a recent study published in *Family Relations*, researchers explored the different ways couples cope with infertility and the impact those coping processes have on their relationships.

The researchers identified three key coping strategies, including “distancing, self-controlling, and accepting responsibility. These were significantly related to couples’ reports of infertility stress, marital adjustment, and depression” (Peterson, Newton, Rosen, and Schulman, 2006, p. 234). For example, couples had higher levels of stress and lower levels of marital adjustment when both the husband and wife blamed themselves for the infertility. Likewise, spouses engaging in a high level of self-control, such as keeping their feelings to themselves, could experience negative reactions from their partner with a low degree of self-control. These couples also had a more difficult time adjusting to their infertility (Peterson et al., 2006).

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The researchers concluded that during this stressful time spouses are urged to find ways to help one another cope with the unexpected pressures of infertility (Peterson et al., 2006).

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To listen to the radio broadcast:

http://www.radiosource.net/radio_stories/487.mp3

http://www.radiosource.net/radio_stories/487.wav

Reference

Peterson, B., Newton, C., Rosen, K., and Schulman, R. (2006). Coping processes of couples experiencing infertility. *Family Relations*, 55, 227-239.