

## SURVIVAL STRATEGIES FOR THE HOLIDAYS

**My wife and I have struggled with infertility for the past year. It has been a very stressful ordeal for both of us. We are supposed to go to Michigan to be with family over the Christmas holiday. We know the holidays are going to be very stressful for us and we are reluctant to go. We dread the inevitable questions such as “Isn’t it time you started a family?” Any advice on how to cope with our infertility during the upcoming holidays?**

The holidays can be stressful for anyone...many people dread the holidays, but they can be particularly difficult for infertility couples. The holiday ‘hype’ is often focused on kids and family...leaving you vulnerable to frustrating family dynamics. At holiday gatherings, well-meaning friends or family members often inquire about a couple’s plans for having children, not knowing about their fertility struggles. In other situations, if they are aware of a couple’s fertility problems, they are often at a loss as to how to behave or what to say. Honest discussion about your emotions and fertility problems may lessen some of the awkwardness. Here are several coping strategies that may help:

- One way to alleviate the stress of painful holiday family gatherings is to *stay home*....don’t go. Avoiding painful family situations may lead to other problems, but in fact may be the best solution under certain circumstances (ie a recent failed IVF attempt). Decline invitations if you think it will be too much of an emotional strain to be around someone’s new baby or obvious pregnancy. Protect yourself.
- Or, *take control* over some of the celebration and limit the time you do spend....decide when you want to go there and when you want to leave.
- *Communicate* with your spouse about these decisions. Your spouse may have a different attitude and you need to try to be on the same page. Just talk about your feelings. Support each other. Talk and compromise...be a team and make it work.
- Plan some *quality time* with family and friends with whom you know you will feel comfortable. Or, better yet, plan a lovely vacation by yourselves ... away from everyone. Remember, the two of you are a family.
- *Prepare yourself* ahead of time for the inevitable awkward questions, such as “When are you going to start a family?” Have a comeback answer ready. For example, “ Thanks for asking, but it’s a painful subject and I don’t feel like talking about it” ...will usually end the discussion.
- Get information about dealing with the stress of holidays and infertility from well-respected *support groups*. National resources available: American Fertility Association ( [www.theafa.org](http://www.theafa.org) ) and Resolve ( [www.resolve.org](http://www.resolve.org) ).

- *Do something nice for other people.* It will take your mind off your problems if you focus on helping others. Remember, there are always others less fortunate than you. Volunteer at a homeless shelter or visit the elderly in a nursing home or a veteran at a local VA hospital. For a truly heartwarming experience, visit Misericordia, Heart of Mercy, an organization / residence that supports children and adults with developmental disabilities in order to maximize their quality of life. ( 6300 N. Ridge, Chicago IL 60660 773-973 6300 [www.Misericordia.org](http://www.Misericordia.org) ) Visit their retail gift shops, bakery or restaurant, or donate your time as a volunteer. Helping others will change you forever....for the better.

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