

Thanks for joining us on Not Boring CEs, where we don't think you should be bored to death while getting your Continuing Ed. Keep listening here, then hop over to notboringces.com to get all your online CE credits. Alright, y'all, let's get to learning.

Allison Ramsey (she/her) is a licensed clinical mental health counselor and infertility survivor. She loves helping people with infertility learn to thrive the way they're used to thriving. Allison has had extensive training through the American Society of Reproductive Medicine and Postpartum Support International. Allison helps people through the grief of infertility, miscarriage, perinatal loss, pregnancy after infertility, postpartum mood disorders, family building decisions, third party reproduction, parenting after infertility and considers herself an all around reproductive mental health ninja.

Welcome back to Not Boring CEs.

I am here with my good friend

and I'm not just saying good friend

to be kind like Allison is
one of my closest friends,

but my, one of my closest
good friends, Allison Ramsey,

and she's gonna be talking
to us about infertility,

infertility, counseling,
like the whole shebang.

And I'm excited about this

'cause I know just being
friends with you, I've learned

so much going through
some of my own struggles

with miscarriages while we were friends

and while you're specializing
in this, there was a lot

of like knowing, knowing

that I could lean on Allison,

my friend, but also knowing
that Allison, my friend,

had a lot of fricking knowledge.

So I'm excited

that you are gonna be
teaching the folks listening

and learning some of what you know.

So thanks for being here.

Thank you. I'm excited to
get to talk to people about it

because it's, it's actually
becoming more, more common.

Even when I started doing this work

a little over 10 years ago
in infertility specifically,

the numbers were one in eight
people in childbearing age

were struggling with infertility.

And now it's one in five.

Oh, dang. Yeah. That's a big leap.

It's a big leap.

And there's a lot of different
speculation about why

that is, which we can go
into in another, another day.

Yeah. But most, most importantly is that it,

if you're seeing, if you're seeing people aged 25 to 45, they may have thought about trying to start a family in some regard. So,

And one in five of them may struggle with that.

That's right. And in some, some regard either

trying to conceive at all,

but for some people trying to conceive isn't the problem

that's staying pregnant is the problem.

And for some people it's access to sperm or eggs is the problem in same sex couples.

And so there, there's

so many different reasons why this is a struggle.

Yeah. Well, can we just talk with like,

how do we define infertility?

How do we know that it's an issue?

Technically infertility is diagnosed when you've been

trying to conceive,

you're under 35 conceiving
with intercourse

and it's taken you more than,
it's taken you 12 months.

Okay. Which is a long time.

Yeah. It's a lot of months of tears,

Period. And if you're, period,

If you're - Like any of us
who were told that, you know,

it would be really, really
easy to get pregnant

and you better be careful

and, you know, use all the contraception

or wait till marriage

or we were just not told
anything about our bodies.

Most, mostly, I think that's
still pretty much the case

about ovulation, about
our menstrual cycles.

So I would say most people are starting

to get a little bit anxious

after even just three
months trying to conceive.

Right.

And if you're over 35, that diagnosis is

for, you've been trying to

conceive for six months.

Okay.

So that does change a little bit.

'cause our fertility drops significantly after 35.

Right? Yeah. Right.

I'm just realizing how we do get that message so much

of like, it's gonna be easy.

Like when you're ready just, you know,

be really careful with your birth control.

'cause if you slip up and how,

because of our friendship group back in Seattle,

I had the opposite message

because everybody either had been struggling for a year

and a half, or was, you know, in the field or whatever.

And so we were like, well, we better start now.

Yeah. And - If we wanna get pregnant the next year or two

and got pregnant the first month

and was able to stay pregnant that time,

which made me feel like a champ.

Right. But it's, it's,
it's interesting how,

depending on your friendship group

and how open they are, it might
be a different conversation,

but the, the kind

of default is be really
careful in your birth control.

'cause the second you're off

of it, you're gonna get pregnant.

Yes. So is my mission
now to start letting

pubescent people know
about their cycles Yes.

And how these things work
way early on versus the,

the mystery that was not
really explained to us.

Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

So it could be, so that's one
thing is like as therapists,

we're receiving people.

There's just, there's no place
for judgment or comparison

because you might think, oh my gosh,

it's only been three months,

but really this person has

done so much work in planning
to get ready to try plus the messages

that we've been given

that it's gonna happen
the second you want it to,

if you're, if you want it to.

And when it doesn't,

three months is a long time to be waiting.

Yeah. And there's always
the, the, the two week wait

after you've hit your ovulation
window, you've gave it,

given it your best shot.

And then there's two weeks to wait

and find out if it worked or not.

Right. So one like

extra training I would do
if, since we don't have time

for this, is to go back and
familiarize yourself with a

basic reproduction of, and,

and the parts of the body
for males and females

and just how this works.

'cause maybe you were
taught it, but maybe not.

Yeah. I mean, I think
a lot of us weren't,

it was maybe breezed over,
like I didn't, I didn't realize

how it all worked until
I was trying to conceive.

I mean, I was like in my
thirties, y'all. Right,

Right.

Like, I knew not like
how not to get pregnant,

but I didn't know how to get pregnant.

Yes. And it's not just the absence

of how not to get pregnant.

That is
Right. For many of us.

And it can be really
exhausting after a while. Yes.

And obsessive, it's very
easy to get obsessive over it

And when it's not working,

it's really an existential crisis.

Yes. Because it's like an
expected, most of the people I see

have planned life out pretty well

and it's worked out for them.

Right.

And then we've got our degree

and we found the right
person found a place to live.

And now nothing, nothing's left, but,

but having that baby and
when it's not happening

and it is happening for your peers

or it's not happening for your peers,

it's really confusing and
throws life all out of whack.

And so that's, that's like the existential

crisis or anxiety

or like who am I, what happens
if I don't become a parent?

Yeah. What if I'm an old parent?

Like if it's not working, oh my gosh,

we waited till we're 37
and it's not working.

What if I'm 40 like these,
all these like existential

what ifs leap out into the future

and leads us just, well I say
us, this was something that

I dealt with early on.

But you don't have to have
had to experience these things

to be able to counsel.

Right. You know, it's like
just fully understanding this

part of the human experience.

Yeah. When I think about
like the, the human experience,

the watching your friends
get pregnant when it's hard

for you all the fucking baby showers.

Like, like there are so many things

that when you're at an age

where your peers are having
an easier time of it,

certain things are just so hard.

And how that can lead to
like mental health issues

or struggles or emotions

that are really uncomfortable
based on just clearly like

straight path to your
own fertility struggles.

Can we talk some about like
the emotional impact? Yes.

And the mental health
issues that come with

not being able to conceive

So much anger and like rage and jealousy

and envy that feel terrible

and people feel like they
can't support their friends

and family the way they used
to or they would like to be.

Well, you know, like I'm supposed

to be throwing my sister a baby shower,

but I can't stand her now.

Right. It
And it doesn't.

And then there's that
reaction to the emotions.

So I'm having these terrible thoughts,

I'm now depressed about those thoughts.

Or I have to show up for
people in a certain way

and I'm really anxious about
going to family gatherings

or when people are gonna ask me when I'm,

when we're gonna have a baby

or really not feeling like
the person you've always felt

you were in the world.

Yes. Or the friend you once were or

Yeah.

Yeah. Like reacting to
what is happening to you.

But there's no, you're
kind of in an isolated void

and trying to understand your experience

through a whole new lens.

And it, it is, even
though it's one in five,

it still seems super long.

It seems like every group of five,

there's still only one
person who's experiencing it.

Right. Like, everybody
I meet, it's like, no,

I don't know anybody that's
like, I guarantee somebody,

you know, is, is going
through this at some regard,

but it is still so shameful.

I hope that is changing a little bit, but,

and as we give more air to that, more,

more celebrities really.

Or if it's even it's been
covered in more like popular

TV shows.

You know, I love, love, love

when I get to hear that.

'cause it's like people being
seen, okay, this really normal

and enticing person on your
show had a miscarriage.

How is she handling that?
It's really helpful.

Yeah. I think too though,
one of the struggles with it,

the portrayal in media is
like in the end it's all okay.

Like they get their baby
in the end, you know,

and that's not the case for everyone.

That's right. And that's
a part of the work in kind

of this pit stop or trail crossing

or waiting room

or something that this, this middle place

where you're forced to stop

and look at your trajectory.

Like what is it that you really want?

Sometimes we're talking about at some

point people are
thinking, do I really want

to be pregnant more than
I want to be a parent?

Or if I can't be pregnant,
do I not wanna be a parent?

All, all fine. All okay.

There are really,

really amazing innovations
in getting pregnant

your gametes like your own eggs

or with someone else's eggs.

Making embryos with
your, with donated eggs,

with your spouse's sperm,
with purchased sperm with

your sister's eggs.

That's like probably
the most common gamete

sharing experience.

But there's so much there that
when you're just coming from,

wait, I'm not getting pregnant,
there's this whole world

that people don't even
wanna open the door to.

100% of the people I've
worked with who've had IVF

or in vitro fertilization,
fertilization outside of the body

that then gets transferred

into the uterus.

100% of people never said
that they wanted to do that.

Right. Right.
You know, like this is

Not, it was like not a part
of anybody's conception plan.

No, no.

Although that's getting might
be a little more common coming

up as people are being more realistic

about freezing their eggs.

Had that, I, I wonder
had that been presented

to me if I would've done that or not?

I think most yeah.

Because people are tired
of waiting for some Yeah.

In some aspects. So there's
also like Do you keep dating

and keep dating or do you
look into becoming a single

parent by choice?

There's just so many
different aspects that

that plague every facet of your life.

And if you're at work

or you're with friends

or you have family

or you walk on a street that
has people with strollers

or pregnant bellies, it's everywhere.

Yeah. So it makes people implode.

Well, when I think about even
like egg freezing, so many,

like, and correct me if I'm wrong,

I'm not the expert in this,

but so many people I know who struggled

with infertility fell into two camps.

One campus. They're like, I
haven't found my partner yet.

And then the other camp is I was trying

to get like my life in order.

Yeah. I was trying to
get through this program

or like get my career

or get to a place where
I was financially solvent

before bringing a kid into the world.

Like those are, and
then it didn't work out

like then I couldn't get pregnant.

I was, I didn't know this
was gonna be an issue.

That's
Right. I think about how like for, for

that camp, freezing
your eggs is expensive.

Yes. And if you're like not having a kid,

'cause you're trying to get financially

to the place you wanna be in,
I can see how it'd be easy

to overlook that as an option.

That's right. - And just be
like, well I can't afford it.

Like I'll, you know, we'll get there soon.

Just one more move or one more promotion

or one more whatever.

Yes. And it, it does seem

probably the youngest person I've worked

with is like probably 36,

but it does seem to be
something a little older.

Like it still feels
like there's hope. Yeah.

And it's really amazing too

to see the freedom on the other
side of like, you know what,

maybe maybe I'll meet a
single dad on the playground,

but I'm not a scam baby.

It's pretty inspiring too,
the way that people can be

changing that traditional track.

First you have to be married
and then you have to blah blah.

Nope. It's like really
going by the wayside

and people are able to find more clearly

what it is that they want.

So there's some really
exciting things about this too.

But also a chance to get

to re reconceive your life expectations.

What was it that I
actually wanted from this

and how long am I willing to try?

Some interesting research
that I love to tell people is

that they did like
quality of life research.

This is Ali Domar Boston.

They did like quality of
life surveys for people

in like cancer treatment

and people in infertility

and people with infertility
ranked their experiences being

worse Hmm.

When compared like when
the results were compared

with people who are
receiving cancer treatment.

There's a lot of ideas about why that is,

but one is that there's not
much support for people going

through infertility.

Right. And with cancer there
is not to compare, you know,

the two ailments, but I think
it's important for people

to know that it feels as bad as it feels

as we might imagine it
feel to have cancer.

Yeah. That's really awful.

It is. It is.

And it's, I think about
the cycle of it too

with your cycle, right?

That like if you get your
period every 28 days-ish

or something like, like

if you are somebody

with a fairly regular period,
you're holding your breath.

Yes.

And like hoping to God

that it doesn't happen

and hope maybe that was a
false negative that I took.

Like, and then all of a
sudden your cycle starts

and it's like hope is over.

Like that's another month lost.

That's right. That's right.

And that's where all these
like, there's so much grief

where someone on the
outside might think, oh,

it's just your period

for someone who's trying
intensely every month

and had to work lots of schedules around

or make sure that every month you're

trying something different.

Like maybe we need to
do it every other day,

or maybe we need to try
it this way or that way.

Like people are doing everything they can

to get it right when we don't
really have as much control

as we want to have.

Right. And so you've
put everything into it

and you think, oh, if I, if
I'm pregnant by this date,

then I'll, my due date will be this date.

Like, we go really far out, you know,

my baby will be a Gemini

and then I'll, you know,

I'll be this much pregnant at this time.

Like that's almost a month to get

to be in that world.

And then you're, you know,

we work on not being too
far out in the future

and trying to live more presently

because that does start to
not serve us after a while.

But especially in the first couple

of months when you're like,
this could happen at any time

that or trying to control not like,

I really, really, really didn't
wanna have a Christmas baby.

Right. So, so like not try
during these times and,

but it then after a
while you're like, okay,

I'll give anything to
have a baby on any day.

Right, exactly. But you're

Trying to do what you can to make sense

of this whatever idealized life

that we thought we could have.

Yeah. I'm thinking too about how

having, like at this age, I've
had a friend who have been

through every infertility treatment.

There is like sisters donating eggs

or bought sperm

or you know, like
I-U-I-I-V-F, frozen eggs,

frozen embryos, like all of it.

I have friends who've, between my

friends it's all been done.

Yeah. - And the thing
about fertility treatment is

there is no ability to chill
anywhere in that process.

Yes. That is so right. That is so right.

It's because then you're,
you've opened this door

to this alternative
method is still not 100%.

Yeah. I was almost floored.

I always thought, and I've actually met,

heard about people's spouses
who like did a transfer

after having an egg retrieval

and then the spouse not understanding

that IVF wasn't a hundred
percent like, oh this isn't,

this is still only 60% chance.

Like what now? Yeah.

You would think with the money,
I mean I think it just shows

how much, how much we don't know yet as

or reproductive
endocrinologists don't know yet,

but it, there is no,

now you've sunk all this
money into something

that still might not work.

Right. And there's a big sunk cost there.

And so that's where like learning,

learning how to live in
that at the same time

and knowing that you're doing
everything you can, you know,

for some, sometimes
it's worth it to people

to know like it's worth
X amount of dollars

to know I did everything I could.

Which is kind of an interesting way

of looking at it versus Yeah.

I I don't wanna waste the money.

It's like it's worth it to
know you did you tried. Right.

And then you can live more
freely on the other side of that,

whatever that is.

Right. That's biological
children or not

or or not children at all.

Right.

When I just think about like
you've been through months

or years of trying your,

you've maybe come to this
decision to do some sort

of fertility treatments the hard way.

Like it was not an easy choice for you
and your partner or for you.

Yeah.
And then it's like

your cycle started on this day,
you've gotta cancel everything you
have scheduled for this day.

You've gotta like blah blah blah.

Like it's so anxiety provoking
just in and of itself.

The treatments. Right.
Plus the hormones. Woo.

Yes. Yes. Like
It's a lot when you've been struggling
for a long time.

Yes. That's a really good point.

It's not, I think other people look at,
oh you're trying IVF great.

Like all your worries are over
and it's like no, they
just amped up even more.

Yeah. And, and the hormones

and trying to understand
that experience for yourself

as well as like not wanting
to tell your boss necessarily.

Like that's always a really
complicated aspect of

how your workplace responds

or how your coworkers who
might have to cover for you

or the curiosity like Right.

You don't wanna share with everybody.

But everybody always
thinks that they, I think

people think that their coworkers

think that they have cancer.

Oh, interesting. Yeah.

Like, because it's
all these appointments

and they're all secretive about it,

but there's no other that is
completely up to an individual.

Like it doesn't make it better
necessarily to tell. Right.

But it just more of what feels bad

of like letting people down

and not being able to be your best self.

Yeah. And these are mostly
like people in their thirties,

you know, that they're generally
like killing it at life.

Yeah. And not used to feeling terrible.

That's another impact too.

It's like, wait, I'm good at life.

I know how to work hard
and get things done.

Like, and for almost everything
else we do in the world,

you work hard and pays off.

It turns out that is like
a shattered core belief

in, in fertility. Yeah.

Yeah. And then you start
to see where else it,

it didn't actually work.

Something was luck or
something was, you know.

Yeah. I it's almost,

it's probably a shattered
core belief in the rest

of adulthood too.

Right? Yeah. Which is some
of this a the age group

that this is happening for too.

It's like that climb I, you
know, graduated from high school

and I got my degrees and I did this

and you climb, climb, climb.

It's reaching that like quarter
life, midlife crisis point

where a lot of our core beliefs
are shattered about things.

If you're good, then good
will come to you. Nope.

Not necessarily.

Sometimes people will use this experience

to make sense of like, like
they're being punished.

Just really what, 'cause that
also maintains a sense of like

a schema we've developed, right?

Like of well if I'm, if I do good things

and good things happen to me,

but if I do a bad thing,
then bad things happen to me.

So like another part of grieving

that comes up can be like,

it can bring up old
traumas or old experiences.

One that comes up a lot is an abortion

that someone had in high school or college

and then makes sense in their mind

that they're being punished for that.

Which is like, oh,

and it's a really wonderful time

to adequately grieve that loss.

Like even, even though they
didn't want to have a child,

no one wants to have an abortion either.

Right? Right. Nobody wants,

but we need, they need to be available.

And so this is a time that
it often can resurface

and we can help to make sense of why

that was still the best
decision for them, you know?

And like really help to
integrate some of this, like some

of the, the parts of us

that get shattered I
think throughout this.

'cause we're constantly
trying to make sense of

how we are in the world
and why things are,

and then that raggedy old one comes up.

So it's something to be ready for

with all these losses.

Right. The not only is the, the period,

but the, the staying
pregnant for a period of time,

abortions, even losses.

Like you're not having a parent

or having lost a sibling earlier in life

or like that it's
representative of so many other

griefs that have gone aggrieved.

'cause we're just bad at that in general.

So that's a lot of the time spent too.

'cause nobody wants to do that.

They're like, I wanna move on.

But if it's not acknowledged

and processed grief,
then it sticks around.

I think it's so appropriate

that like you started your career,

like your niche was initially grief

and that it shifted to infertility

because I think you're,

you're like especially

adept at managing that part

and not brushing over it in
the way that as a therapist

I would want to brush over it

because I'm less comfortable
with grief than you are.

You know, I mean I'd like dictate it

like go ahead and grieve.

Yeah. But like in myself,

I'm not gonna spend much
time as you well know.

Oh it's so good. It's, and
it's like helps to expand.

It's something we're afraid of,

but it helps to expand
the in let us have the,

the full access to being alive.

Like that we can't have love if we can't,

if we're not willing to have hurt.

And then it opens us up to all, all of it.

It's a really, I don't know.

I don't wanna just like silver line it,

but I feel like that's
part of, part of my job

as a cheerleader
sometimes is that there's,

there's, this is rife with potential

for post-traumatic growth.

Right. There we go.
It's this unexpected

stalling out and then we
figure something out from

it about who we are.

About Oh the like
relationships. Experiences.

Like people learning to actually fight in

their like spousal

connection spouses.

The non, the the, the party not intending

to carry is still experiencing infertility

but in a different way.

'cause their body is not
as used up within it.

But male and female, it's still equal.

Like if it's a male, male

male end end of why it's not
working or it's a female end

and then still a third
is just this combination.

Like there's still just

so much we don't know.

Yeah. And I think that
can be really frustrating

for people too is to
not like, to not be like

properly diagnosed around it to be like,

we don't know why y'all
are infertile together.

Yes. Like everything looks
okay with both of you.

That's right. That's a
lot of, that's where a lot

of my friends have
fallen that unexplained.

That unexplained. And it's,
yeah, it's a tough place to be.

'cause you can't fix it if
you don't know what's wrong.

That's right.

Yeah. And, and so it's
then people are trying

to figure out that going to the internet

and saying, so if I eat all this pineapple

or all these beets

or there's some, we just don't know if it,

I say if you love pineapple, go for it.

But we don't have any

data that supports that.

But that also goes back to like

who is supporting the research
to find these things out.

You know, like international
pineapple growers are not

like putting the money
into infertility research.

Right. We don't know. Right.

And there's so many factors all the time.

So we, we end up really
focusing on optimizing health

versus optimizing fertility.

And if you love bone
broth, chug, chug a lug.

But if it makes you wanna
throw up then don't bother.

Like part of it is like ask,
trying to figure out how

to feel like you're still
in control of something.

So I think about this in terms of like,

it's already like a stressful
anxiety provoking situation

and then maybe you're trying
to like gain some control

through diet or pineapple or whatever.

You know, like you're
trying to gain control

and maybe you're going through treatment.

So your schedule's also wackadoo.

That's a lot of, I'm imagining
like a client in therapy too.

That's a lot of new

or different stress than
they may have come into their

therapist with if it wasn't
an infertility specialist.

That's right. - Do you, do
you recommend people refer out

to a fertility specialist?

Or do you recommend they keep the client

and get some like consultation?

It just depends. There may be,

there may be times where like
if someone is starting to,

because it we're, we're
headed towards a lot

of coping skills, a lot
of stress relief, a lot

of like boundaries

and relationship processing
like, which I think a lot

of therapists do anyway.

And when it might start to feel out

of your depth could be
considering like donor

or starting to process
how to go about that

or known donors

and thinking about like, yeah

I guess like raising donor
conceived kids, what else?

But I think as long as it's
still a conversation, you know,

that the therapist is saying
like, I don't have a ton

of experience in this area.

Like at what point do you are like

we wanna keep, if the client
feels okay edu trying to say

if we don't want the, to
burden the client too much

with trying to educate the therapist.

Maybe you write down like,
oh Google gonadotropin

or something that you're, it's a,

and it depends on your
rapport with your client too.

If it feels you don't want her to have

to spend the whole time educating you.

She's already trying to
do that with her family

and her spouse and herself.

And that might not feel
like a great use of time.

So you can be open and upfront about that

and do a little bit of
your research on your own

that you will start

to feel it if you're not feeling helpful.

We all kind of get that sense,
which is a wonderful part of

that relationship too.

Of like, I, this is not my strong suit

and I wanna help you get
the help you really need

and I'm still here for you.

Or like, 'cause as a long-term therapist,

you might already hold
so much of their history

and understand, oh you're
trying to explain all of this

to your mom

or you don't wanna tell your
mom anything about this.

So there's some real benefit to that too.

And so the client could also
use an infertility focused

therapist for some, what
would you call that?

Just like touchups or a

drop-ins at some point.

I've definitely received other
people's clients for a period

of time and then handed them back off

that sometimes resolving,

resolving infertility is all
the stress that there was.

But then for other folks
then there's the pregnancy

after infertility

and so then we're managing
anxiety on ongoingly.

Yeah. And there's really no date.

There's this weird apex I guess of

I'll feel better when I am
get my first ultrasound.

I'll feel better when I make
it to the second trimester.

I'll feel better at 20 weeks.

And you just keep kicking
that can down the road.

But it turns out the, you
don't wanna, they don't want

to fully be in the pregnancy

or thinking about baby showers

or their lists of things that they want

or need or thinking about their nurseries.

It's also a, it almost feels
like they're betraying their

infertile self, their
infertile self has spent

so much time being mad

and angry at pregnant people

and then you're a pregnant person.

And so it's really confusing
to cross over so that

that takes, sometimes they're 30 weeks

and they're like, shit, I
need to plan a baby shower

or I need to figure out what,
what I'm getting for this,

this is happening protective about

whether or when this is
actually, you know, going all in.

If it's been a hard, how do I
know I'm gonna believe this,

that this is really gonna happen.

So then there's parenting
after infertility. Right.

It certainly can like start to spin out of

ways to that you can be afraid
of things not working out

and that will go on and on and on.

So if it's managed in
infertility, like how do we deal

with the unknown?

How do we receive bad
things that happen to us?

How do we manage our
own anxiety ongoingly?

I think it makes like
one hell of a parent.

Absolutely. Yeah.

To get to that place.

Oh, but with, with, with awareness

and mindfulness too,

because it could also make you the

ultimate helicopter parent.

You know, do you know how
much I paid to get you Right.

Yeah. It
Can be not helpful

and people who struggled with infertility

and did not get mental health support
for it are more likely
to suffer from postpartum mood disorders.

Mm. And so that's another case I have

for infertility counseling
is that let's learn a bunch

of skills now that you're gonna
use through your pregnancy

and throughout your parenting journey.

It's kind of awesome.

Yeah, I love that.

Yeah. Like starting
way early about like how

to be a parent isn't just, I think it's

so much more managing our own shit.

It is. It is.

And if you learn to do

that in infertility before there's a kid

and it could be all set

Done Dusted.

Yeah.

You don't need

anything else. Easiest thing you'll

Ever do.

Oh, that's, that's another,
that's another training. Yeah.

Somebody will do that training.

Yeah. I'm thinking about like

maybe like a younger
therapist version of me

and the kind of pitfalls I
might have fallen into if I was

seeing a client who was then struggling

with infertility later.

I would've referred them
out on the front end.

But if it was somebody I had
a relationship with. Yeah.

And I can imagine my optimistic
cheerleader self being like

giving a lot of false hope

as if it was rooted in anything real.

You know, like,

well IVF absolutely you'll get pregnant.

Look let's just keep your stress down

at a time when everybody's
like, reduce your stress.

It'll happen when you're
least expecting it.

And all these things when it's like how

how am I supposed to reduce my stress?

Exactly. Like what That's right.

Like what does that even look like?

Yes,

Yes. Right now when I'm responsible for

so much just to have this one thing

that was supposed to come so easily.

So I think about like that as a pitfall.

I might have fallen
into acting like I knew

what they were talking about
when I didn't, you know,

and not doing the research afterwards.

'cause I didn't write it down
and I was like, go now what?

Yeah, yeah, yeah. You know? That's right.

What are some other, like saying,

saying too many platitudes?

We don't even say it's so
hard if we're not aware

of infertility.

It's so easy to make assumptions

or, I, I still remember asking
someone at a wedding once,

like they had maybe a 3-year-old

and I was like, oh, when are
you gonna have number two?

Like that may

or may not have been a
triggering question for them.

But now that I know more that, you know,

the person could have
just run into the bathroom

and cry the rest of the night.

Like I'm trying. Damn it. Yeah.

It's, I guess what would I say to that?

Like not, not trying

to make them feel better,
which is really hard

'cause that's part of our job.

But actually grieving

and like research shows that
psychoeducation about the,

the normalization

and validation of this,
like this reproductive story

opens up space for people to feel better.

Like helping people access resources.

Not, and I think that is
the sense of isolation

or the, the false hope is

what happens when somebody
is surrounded with people

who haven't experienced infertility.

And so I help help clients understand

or translate those words like,

oh my mom asked me when I was
gonna finally have a baby.

And to translate any
troublesome statement like

that from a loved one as I love you

and I care about you

and I wish I could help that.

That's just this like
meeting them where they are

but they don't have the
ability to say that or Right.

Or do it. But if it's
more work on the person

with infertility.

But it helps us not to hold onto it.

Like, I can't believe
my mom said that thing.

She cares about me. She
doesn't know how to support me.

I'm gonna set it down and
seek out the people who can.

And so as a, as a therapist,
I think being curious about

the experience, what's it like

for you when you take those shots?

Like you have to, that's a
one wonderful thing about our

many wonderful things about
our jobs is that we get

to be curious to, to really
compassionately wonder.

And if you can stand in
your own shoes of like

what is something I really,
really, really wanted with all

of my heart and knew that
my life could only be

as I wanted it to be if I had this thing

and I could not get it.

If you can really try to stand
there and how would you feel

and how would you feel when everyone else

around you can get it with ease

and start to empathize in that way.

Not baby specific.

And definitely if you've your therapist

and you've had babies or
you've had a lot of babies

or you just these, you
know, he just looks at me

and I get pregnant.

Those kind of things. Not intentionally

harmful but so harmful,

Right?

Yeah.

To kinda keep your own
reproductive experience out of it

completely even.

And even if you're somebody

who didn't ever want kids, right?

Like I just, so still
imagining your own thing.

What's the thing you really, really wanted

and had a hard time getting

or couldn't get it without a lot of luck,

magic and wishing because
it doesn't matter.

Like the, this is for now, it's magic

how people get pregnant.

That that's because we're just
not there scientifically yet.

We're closer than we were
you know, 50 years ago.

But it's still a really
new understanding of

how this happens.

So that's a really good, that's
a really good question in

asking them if you do, maybe preparing

as you transfer some of
your work, if you're working

with a longtime patient

and you're transferring
within your own work

of saying this is not my strong suit,

this is not my expertise, will you tell me

when I've said something harmful

that it can be really
great grounds for practice

'cause you've already
got this relationship,

you're not gonna take it personally.

You know that. It gives
her a chance to say

that was really hurtful
the way you put that

and say, I'm so sorry.

Can you tell me a better
way that I could say that?

And Yeah. And how
empowering that could feel

and then practice for the next person

who says something stupid.

Yeah, yeah.

I think about also young
me, I then going on

to do some research and
doing the, have you tried,

Oh that's really
Good in session

and how like, awful that
would be as a client.

Like yes, I fucking tried everything.

I've read all the things

that you just read over a
weekend plus years worth more.

That's right, that's right.

That that is, that is really hard.

I think that is us realizing

like the counselor staying in their lane

and I, I always wanna know, you know,

have you seen your OB GYN about this?

But I'm like, cool, they've
got this, you know that,

what are they telling you?

What are you learning about that?

Like where the support
person, we're not the ones

make, we're helping
them manage the emotions

around this process and not
helping them get pregnant.

Yes. That's their, their own path

In any way.

Let's not help our clients get pregnant

in any way. That's right.

Ethics. Oh,

the one thing I was gonna
mention, I forgot about the,

the study where they had
quality of life surveys

for infertility patients
and cancer patients.

Is that they, they found too

that the, it's the same researcher.

It might not be the same study,

but Ali Domar also found that

stress does not get in
the way of conceiving. Oh

Whoa.

That just blew my mind. I had no idea.

Yeah. Like it's a
real, we we don't have,

we still don't have any data
that stress gets in the way

of conceiving and

Oh my gosh,

People get pregnant
through war and famine

and drug abuse,

like really awful life situations.

But the only thing stress
does get in the way

of is continuing to try.

Mm. And so when we can
help people manage stress,

they can keep doing more months of trying

And the - More months of
trying, the more likelihood is

that you'll figure it out either way.

I always say we will all get
on the other side of fertility.

Right? You can't imagine what that is.

We're there like, and there's this whole,

but it, it's a different
perspective isn't it?

Like you spend all of your
adolescents not getting pregnant

and then finding the right
person to get pregnant

with then trying, trying, trying.

Then being, hopefully being
pregnant, having babies,

figuring if you're gonna
have more like this whole

reproductive world.

And then there's the other
side of it where you'll need

to find yourself again.

And for some people going through
infertility, we can access

that adult part of like
who are you outside

of work, outside of your spouse.

It's really potentially rich

because when there are children,
they take up a lot of space

and time and thinking
it's fine, it's great.

But people who get a little
bit of time ahead of time

to say, okay, I made it to adulthood.

I don't just watch TV all the time.

Like what else am I interested in?

What else can I do with my time?

And then that makes you an
adult that a child wants

to watch, learn how to be an adult.

Yes.

And then it makes happy parents who

have kids that go off

and do other things who
are there in high school.

They're in college doing their own thing

and they get to watch their parent

engaged in the world in a positive way

that maybe you learned how to do factor

during your infertility days.

So that's like, I've had people
like learn to play the banjo

and learn knitting.

Knitting was my personal thing.

I'm still knitting up
a storm making things

that nobody wants to wear.

But it's not about, not about that

Too bad.

Infertility helped me

like oh I have time. Okay.

Like what else can I be doing?

Learning about being curious
about that has nothing to do

with trying to conceive.

Yeah. It's pretty life giving.

So I'm thinking about like the differing
presenting concerns

of like early fertility struggles Yeah.

Versus like ongoing infertility.

Been at it for a really long time.

How does, how does that
look differently in session?

That's such a good question.
How does that look early.

See most of the, most
of the people I meet

have already been
experiencing infertility

for a period of time.

So I'm trying to think
about the handful of people

that I knew ahead of time

and like what I think
there, there's like a,

hey we're gonna start trying,

you know, not in August

'cause we've got like
three weddings to go to.

There's always like
these considerations.

But after that last wedding then,

then we're gonna start trying that.

So I'm on alert of like,
oh okay, here we go.

'cause there's a lot
of expectation and hope

and okay, that didn't
happen the first month.

You know, we can give another shot.

It might not even take up a
lot of energy in session yet.

Like Right. For three,

four months maybe.

And then such a good question.

'cause I'm picturing like the
life cycle of the infertility,

the trying to conceive person.

Yeah. Not than just infertility,

but sometimes, you know,
you do get pregnant

after eight months.

But those, that was a
hell of an eight months

because I thought, oh my gosh,
am I gonna be like my sister?

Or like this other person
I knew is that, oh,

these so scary.

So I think that after a few
months the darkness starts

to creep in the, oh no,

what if, huh?

Maybe they google like

more and more time down
Reddit rabbit holes

or Instagram rabbit holes about trying

to learn more about what, is
there anything else they can do

to all those tiny little things

like what was I doing?

I stopped using my like BPA
free plastic water bottle.

It was still pla but it was plastic.

And I was like, anything I
can do, I have this metal one

for a while, anything but like
as long as I've known you.

But then there that starting to reach out

for control.

What else can I be doing?

Starting to maybe react to the more

and more you're counting
down the people you know

that are getting pregnant.

Oh, maybe there's a friend group

and there's, there's the first one

and then there's the second one.

It's almost like falling bowling pins.

And then when you're the last one, which,

which is a really good
time I think for all,

I think all women in this phase of life

who are trying to conceive,
I think being aware

that we need different support.

Like that person who is
pregnant, she needs support,

but just not from her infertility friend.

Right. Right. And the,
the person with a newborn,

oh my gosh, needs so much support,

but not from your infertility friend.

And your infertility person
needs so much support,

but not from the person with a newborn.

Right. And so it's a real shift

and I just wish we could
normalize it more that we've got,

we get so much, oh wow,

we've been friends since kindergarten

or we've all been best
friends since middle school.

It's like, that's great,

but there's this stage of life

where we are expanding
into these new realms that

we need maximum support
for that stage of life.

And I do think people come
back together, like come back

around maybe when kids are in kindergarten

or don't take as much
space for the parent,

but for people trying for
people who are pregnant,

for people who have little kids.

Like everybody needs to
find support that matches

where they are in that, in that time.

And then you can reconvene
with your go do things

with your friends from
high school or a weekend

or how that is.

But I, I think that's a
big, that's an expectation

that a lot of women have had of like,

we'll all be pregnant at the same time.

And it's like, no, you won't.

It just probably won't work
out that way. Yeah. Yeah.

It might be everybody within
like three or four years,

but those are some big
years self discovery

and understanding

and we, I guess just knowing
that people aren't trying

to abandon you, but that you also need

to seek out the support for
this time of your life too.

Yeah.

And at any point you might cross over

True

Being a pregnant person and,

and then you're like,

Hey guys, remember me.

Woohoo.

Can I join your pregnant club? And yeah.

And it's really scary,
especially if we've had a,

a tight group of friends
or haven't branched out

and so it's a place where,

and most people who end up in
an infertility support group,

nobody wants to be there.

Right. I, I don't know
where this phrase came from,

but people say it's the,
it's the worst group

with the best members.

Kinda like nobody wants
to identify as that.

And it's interesting for
people to see their judgment of

what they thought all the
people there would be like.

Right. When they're just
like everybody, like yes.

They just, every people who
have this hard thing going on,

but they're like the same
people as all of our friends.

That's right. And they
get it. It's amazing.

They definitely, sometimes when I can't,

if I can't see someone or
our schedules don't match up

or they're like, I've
contacted all these people,

I would say, please check out now

that pretty much everything is virtual.

There's so much access to support groups

and different time zones and Yeah.

People you never have
to run into in person.

I don't want to, it can just
be their secret support.

Yeah.

Cool. Yeah, that's a great question.

And just thinking about how
necessary that support is,

like you're saying like
your friendships shift.

I mean, I think about
like, we had our crew

of like four couples in Seattle

and I got pregnant so fast

and one of our friends
couldn't be around me.

And that was really hard
for me as somebody who was,

you know, I'm like, where'd my friend go?

But also I could empathize
that that would be like,

I get it, but but

Not, I mean, it, it's hard. It's

Like, I mean, it sucks for everybody.

Yes. Right. Like it was a
bad, like I can understand.

And then, and then I
remember our, another couple,

they were getting married on the, now

that it was legal in Washington,
they were getting married

and I couldn't, I had this newborn,

I could not get out the
door in time to get there.

And they had also been struggling.

And so to be like, and
then I missed your wedding

because of my newborn that I get to have.

Oh. And so it like, it shifts
your relationships in ways

that nobody's gonna predict nobody.

Yeah. And like yeah.

So it had been, you
know, the crew got janky.

Yeah. Yeah.

And, and I, and I did not know at the time
that I would need such
specified unique support.

It's something that I really drive
for people when they are getting pregnant.

It's like, who are your people?

Because it takes a village
and sometimes the people
that were your people
before babies don't have the capacity
to be your people after babies.

Right. Or your interests
change. I've seen that a lot.

Yeah. Well, and like you're
going through infertility
and the people that were your people
that kept you bolstered
are now hard to be around.

Like it makes it worse to be around them.

And then you have to find
new people, which sucks.

And, and I, I don't want
people to think it's replacing,

sometimes it's replacing,

but it's diversifying your portfolio.

There we go. And,

And toss a therapist in there.

Support group. Right.

But, and that, that's helpful.

That's helpful for our longevity. Right.

That's

True. Great research on people

who like octogenarians

who have higher quality

of life would say, while I've
got more than just my spouse

because that person's
gonna die one of be with,

and then I found my friend that I can go

for walks with like, yeah.

My friend who likes
sushi, I like my friend

who likes bad movies.

You know, the one who I know
will be up before 10:00 AM

and the one who's will
stay up past 10, 10:00 PM

But the more people we have,
like that represent parts of us,

the better we do Kids kind start

with this phase of life.

Yeah. That you might find a mom friend

that really serves you in that first year.

And then after a while

it's like, okay, we,

we've got some other stuff going on.

Or it's just a natural progression or

or an infertility friend who
serves you during infertility

and sometimes they stay close

or if you all get
pregnant at the same time

or are doing cycles at the same time,

it's can be really amazing support.

But I think it's a
lesson in non-attachment

that it's kind of new for
our 30 something selves.

We're used to like, oh,

we've been friends since high
school or something like that.

Right. Really important longevity.

But turns out we can have
really great connections

with people for as long as we have them.

Yeah.

Maybe that's like six months, maybe

that's 30 years.

And we learn something from everyone

and benefit from those
connections no matter what.

Because to the therapist gets to be

that long-term committed person,

understanding the story

and like helping them,

helping them tell their
reproductive story.

We think as I always,
I notice I speak in, we

as in infertility patients
and then we as therapists.

So, And mine bounces back and forth

and that is that as the infertility
person with infertility,

we see just this chunk.

We don't see that it's a, a chapter in

a multitude of chapters in our lives.

And our brains are still like
pretty newly fully developed

at this time too.

Like right. Mid thirties.

Were not just starting to, starting
to get the grasp on things
and trying to understand how each part,
how you tell this story will impact
your future and how Yeah.

So your beliefs become shattered,
but you develop new beliefs
with the help of your therapist.

It's yay.

Yeah. There's, there
there's so many spaces

for like continued
education for a therapist.

Like if you are gonna go into this realm,
like the American Society
of Reproductive Medicine is the bomb.

They are, they've really bad marketing.

I think I even Googled
just Googled the, you know,

infertility counseling training

and they were like bottom
of the page when they're the

like the, the national place to go

because there's so much
more just about like

the reproductive system.

You're like the understanding the hormones

that like if you're
into that can be helpful

to know all that.

Like a, a mini reproductive
endocrinology medical degree.

Just a mini degree.

Just a little

miniature miniature one.

Yeah. What else?

Well I'm wondering like,
and we're coming up on time,

but actually

let's see, what are some things
that people can do to help?

Like, I'm so glad to hear stress
is not impacting fertility

and still like Wow. It's still

Make you go crazy.

Right? Exactly. Exactly.

So like they're still in
this really painful place.

What is something people can do

to relieve some of that stress?

Yes. While going through all of this,

It can be really helpful just to know

stress does not cause infertility.

Yeah. And you know what, I
tell people that every day

and people still don't believe me,

but for the people who do want
to believe that that can be,

they can stop stressing
about their stress.

Right. 'cause that's,
I mean that's such a big,

I mean I remember that.

So it doesn't impact miscarriages either.

No, no. Geez. No, no.

People are like, I did something
wrong. Yeah. Oh goodness.

Like it feels bad enough
to have this happen

and then to punish and blame yourself.

Yeah. Yeah. Oh my gosh.

Like it, it is just, it
feels, it's just not helpful

because it's not based in fact

and it, it says something

about how much we want life

to make sense.

Yeah. And that's human.

We've made put a lot of
parameters around life

to like make sense out
of the chaos that it

probably really more so is.

And so one the kind

because people want some
something they can control and do.

One is like learning
diaphragmatic breathing

or belly breathing, which
is really interesting.

When I start first learn
this, I was like, oh,

I have been sucking it in all my life.

Most people, I it's a lot of
people have been doing that.

And so it's still kinda,
it's really unfamiliar. Yeah.

To blow out your whole belly

and then breathe in

and hold it for two
seconds and breathe out.

'cause you're trying to

strengthen that muscle

that helps you inflate your entire

lung situation, the diaphragm.

And when you're strengthening that,

then you're fully oxygenating your blood,

then you're lowering your heart rate

and decreasing your blood pressure.

And that just feels good.

And to the best time.

This isn't like emergency breathing, like,

'cause that never works when

somebody's like, just calm down.

Right. It's planning a part of your day.

Maybe every time you're at a
stoplight you do those breaths

or you wake up and wait for
your coffee or tea to brew

and you do three or four of those breaths.

So integrating some of the
stress management with the rest

of what you're doing every day.

What else? Meditation, which
everybody loves to hear.

I'm already feeling resistant,

Allison.

I know, right? So a simple like

one, one that I love is a like
stepping outside breathing in

and out and checking in
with each of your senses.

And it's a, it's an easy
learning about how to, how

to drop into right now

and be getting a chance to strengthen that muscle.

That is the thinking mind.

Oh look, I just had a
thought about the trash can.

Coming back to my breath.
Breathing in. I'm breathing out.

Oh, there's a siren.

Oh, I wonder what's happening
with the fire. Oh, okay.

Oh, I just noticed a thought
about fire coming back

to my breath coming in.

I'm breathing out, there's,
there goes my neighbor,

oh I need to make sure I text her

about that thing that's happening.

Like there's all that and I,
it's a good outside experience

'cause there's just more sensory rich

and we're not too attached.

If you're in your house, it
could be like, oh, there's

that messy countertop.

I need to clean it off. You
don't have as much power.

You just see your neighbor
drive by and you wave

and you notice the thought and
you come back to your breath

and maybe you get, you will get distracted

and you won't get through
all your senses at first.

But you'll know you tried

and it's like picking up that
weight and doing it twice.

You're not like have a
huge muscle after that.

But if you do it every day
for a little bit, you start

to notice where your thinking
has been when it's helpful.

People who don't look
up expected due dates

for each month anymore.

Yeah. People who get so much
out of the practice of that,

that I see them once they're pregnant.

And I, I always like to
ask what week they are.

'cause I think it's helpful
for us to hear ourselves say,

I am 21 weeks today.

You know, because it's
such an out of body,

people don't feel really integrated

with their pregnant bodies.

And so trying to ask questions
about that experience,

but people who, people lose
track, like they've gotten

so removed from trying to,

and then it's like now
we're in the year 2024

and I'm supposed to have a baby this year.

Somehow, like it doesn't quite
align or feel, feel real.

So dropping into the
present as much as possible

imagery of like

something I love about like
early pregnancy imagery

or even, even two week
weight imagery is like

if, if they have a decent relationship

with their mom to re-see and

Imagine what it's like when
you go visit your mom or,

or a, a kind friend or a
compassionate person in your life.

They receive you. They
say, Hey, come welcome.

We're so glad you're here. We
have all your favorite things.

I hope you can stay for a really long time

and maybe you stay, maybe you don't.

But compassionate, loving being,

receives it all.

And so to be trying to conceive

and imagining, Hey baby, I'm here.

Please stay for as long as
you can. You're welcome.

I love you. Like for some people initially

that feels risky

because they think if I ignore it,

then it will be like it never happened.

When my period comes, I
won't be disappointed.

Well, it turns that doesn't

actually work that way.

You're gonna be
disappointed anyway. Right?

If you really want this,
you're gonna be upset.

And so what I see helps for people,
even when people have miscarriages,
that they are glad that they were
as receptive as they could be.

Mm. And I've seen people
do like both, you know, the

having the fearful pregnancy.

What I don't wanna get too
attached, which makes me laugh

because it's like, right, you're literally
attached changing.

But it just said so much
about what we try to control

in this fearful what
we don't want to feel.

And so what happens when
we don't attach miscarry

and then feel even worse
that we did something?

Which is not true. It's just just science.

It's just biology. So many miscarriages.

Well, all miscarriages are not something that you did. Hmm.

No, it's, it's something that's happening biologically.

Like we just can't know all the reasons why.

But we, we do know like what it's like to receive

and love openly or,

or what you might call loving with an open hand.

Hmm. Oh yeah. Holding it loosely. That's right.

And receiving it as it is

and urging it to stay.

But if it needs to go, it needs to go.

And you wish them well and greet them

and know that they were missed.

And it's a lot

of like making okay, these scary feelings

that end up when we do make space for them, they're not

so scary anymore.

And shine the light on it.

Look, oh, we can have compassion for that.

That's a good imagery.

Even walking like gentle exercise.

It's hard for the, you could
still run for stress relief

and stuff, but it's like marathon training

and like triathlon
training does like send,

send blood away from the reproductive
organs into your extremities.

So maybe stop running 20 miles a day.

But most of the time it's not gonna, if

that's still something
you do for stress relief,

like do it journaling.

Like starting to, we've got lots

of great data on the
benefits of journaling

and it helps to narrate this part

of your story.

Yeah. To see what you're thinking about it

and see how you can help yourself

through this hard time

and thinking differently
about this process.

Awesome. Yeah.

So helpful. Thank you. Yay.

Thank you for the conversation.

Thank you for like, I
really think a lot of people

are gonna be able to,
to see this or hear this

and feel more clear about
where their competency is.

Okay. And like to know that

they're friends when they're, I mean,

I know this is all
supposed to be clinical,

but like if, if people
watching or listening, if they

or their friends are
going through this, like

that's a one in five y'all.

Yeah. You're gonna know

and love people who go
through infertility.

And so these are all
just good things to know

as a human being, not just as a therapist.

That is so good. I have a hard time.

I think I had a hard time being the friend

after being the therapist.

Mm. That's a funny place

to walk that line. And I think, right?

Like

I kind of know what to do,

but I'm not sure what
to do in this situation.

'cause I'm just a friend

and what do you,

how can I be helpful?

Or do you wanna talk about it?
Do you wanna go for a walk?

Like not giving advice

still still not giving advice.

They've got that for that.

Yeah. Yeah.

'cause I can see how that,
that's easier to fall apart

as a friend Yes. Than as a therapist.

Yes. Or telling stories about, well my

sister-in-law did blah, blah blah.

Right. It's

Just, there's a million different ways

that people find themselves
on the other side of this.

And it's, even though we're all floored

by those stories about, you know, somebody

that did an egg retrieval

and then got pregnant, like,

don't tell anybody those stories.

Right. Absolutely.

They're fun to hear, but not
when you're going through it.

Yeah. That's so helpful
to think about how to be

compassionate friends with boundaries.

Yes. Well, thank you for
being my friend with boundaries

and for teaching other therapists how to,

how to handle this. So, yay.

Thank you. Thank you.

I hope that broadened your clinical horizons! Head over to notboringces.com to get your CE credit. Wanna have a Not Boring conversation with me about your clinical area of expertise? You can apply there, too. If you like this conversation, leave us a five star review, tell a friend, and be sure to subscribe for future conversations.