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Infertility Emotional Support Clinical Practice Workbook

A clinically branded, function-preserving edition retaining the original exercises, psychoeducation, checklists, logs, planning tools, and response space.

DSM-5-TR · ICD-11 CLINICAL ALIGNMENT

1 · Self-Assessment

2 · Identifying Your Emotions

3 · Grief Processing

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5 · Fear Facing

6 · Challenge Negative Thoughts

7 · Couples Connection

8 · Communicating Your Needs

9 · Boundary Setting

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12 · Coping Mechanisms Inventory

13 · Alternative Paths to Parenthood

14 · Life Planning Beyond Infertility

How to use this workbook

- Use this workbook selectively and collaboratively; it is educational and does not replace individualized assessment, diagnosis, treatment, medical care, or crisis services.
- Skip, pause, or modify any activity that increases distress, danger, shame, or loss of functioning. Adapt language for culture, disability, neurodivergence, health, resources, and lived context.
- Ratings in this workbook are reflection tools unless a named, validated measure and interpretation are explicitly provided.

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Self-Assessment

Rate each statement on a scale from 1-5 (1 being “strongly disagree” and 5 being “strongly agree”):

Statement	Rate (1-5)
1. “I find myself constantly thinking about my fertility struggles, and it's hard to focus on anything else.”	1-2-3-4-5
2. “I feel overwhelmed with sadness or anger whenever I see or hear about others' pregnancy announcements.”	1-2-3-4-5
3. “I've started to avoid social gatherings and family events because I can't handle the questions or the sight of children.”	1-2-3-4-5
4. “I notice that I have very little interest in activities or hobbies that I used to enjoy.”	1-2-3-4-5
5. “I'm finding it hard to maintain intimacy with my partner; our relationship feels strained because of our fertility issues.”	1-2-3-4-5
6. “I feel a constant sense of guilt, wondering if there's something I did wrong or could have done differently to prevent these fertility issues.”	1-2-3-4-5
7. “I've become more irritable lately, getting upset or frustrated over small things that wouldn't usually bother me.”	1-2-3-4-5
8. “I find myself pulling away from my partner, friends, and family because I feel like they can't truly understand what I'm going through.”	1-2-3-4-5
9. “I've started to question my self-worth and sometimes feel like I'm failing as a partner because of our struggles to conceive.”	1-2-3-4-5
10. “There are moments when I feel hopeless about the future, worrying that my dream of becoming a parent may never come true.”	1-2-3-4-5

Score: _____/55

The score reflects the severity and impact of your infertility stress.

What statements resonated with you more than the others? _____

Identifying Your Emotions

1. Initial Emotional Inventory

- Think about the feelings you've experienced recently regarding your infertility journey. List them without judgment. Common emotions might include sadness, anger, hope, despair, loneliness, jealousy, and guilt.

- Next to each emotion, rate its intensity on a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being very mild and 10 being extremely intense. Mark how frequently you experience each emotion using symbols such as + for occasionally, ++ for frequently, and +++ for very frequently.

- What events, situations, or thoughts tend to trigger these emotions?

Emotion	Intensity (1-10)	Frequency	Trigger

2. Understanding Emotional Patterns

- Reflect on how these emotions impact your daily life, relationships, work, and self-esteem.

- Based on your emotional exploration, identify any unmet needs or desires. (e.g., the need for support, understanding, or a break from treatment)

- What coping strategies have you been using to manage your emotions? (e.g., talking to friends, immersing in work, avoiding baby-related events)

- What healthier coping strategies can you try? (e.g., joining a support group, writing about your thoughts and feelings)

Grief Processing

1. Acknowledging Your Grief

- Detail the aspects of loss you are grieving due to infertility. Consider the loss of dreams, expectations, biological connections, or experiences you had hoped for.

- How has infertility changed your expectations about the future? (e.g., rethinking life goals, considering alternative family-building methods, questioning identity)

2. Expressing and Releasing Grief

- Write a letter to the future that you had envisioned but are now grieving. Acknowledge its loss and express your feelings about letting go.

3. Coping and Processing

- Honestly identify any unhealthy coping mechanisms you might have leaned on (e.g., substance use, self-isolation) and reflect on their impact.

- List coping strategies that have provided some relief or comfort in your journey. (e.g., talking with loved ones, journaling, engaging in hobbies)

4. Finding Meaning and Moving Forward

- Reflect on any insights or lessons you've learned about yourself, your relationships, or life through coping with infertility.

- Consider if there are any acts of remembrance you wish to perform to honor the loss experienced through infertility. This could be planting a tree, donating to a relevant cause, or another meaningful gesture.

- What new opportunities or paths are you open to exploring because of your journey (e.g., alternative family-building methods, pursuing personal growth, advocacy for infertility awareness)

Anger Management

1. Understanding Your Anger

- List specific situations, comments, or thoughts related to your infertility that trigger feelings of anger.

- Reflect on how you experience anger both physically (e.g., tension, headache, increased heart rate) and emotionally (e.g., frustration, feeling overwhelmed). How does this influence your behavior, such as the urge to confront, withdraw, or suppress your feelings?

- Consider what feelings might be underpinning your anger, such as sadness, fear, or a sense of injustice.

2. Anger Expression

- How do you typically express your anger? Are these expressions helpful or harmful to you and those around you?

3. Healthy Anger Management Strategies

- Identify calming techniques that work for you when you feel anger rising. The following are some suggestions. Check off the ones that may be helpful or add more to the list:

- ☐ **Deep Breathing:** Slow, deep breaths can help calm your nervous system and reduce anger.
- ☐ **Count to Ten:** Taking a moment to pause and count can give you time to cool down before reacting.
- ☐ **Physical Activity:** Engage in exercise or physical activity to release built-up tension and reduce stress.
- ☐ **Time-Out:** Step away from the situation that's causing anger until you feel calmer.
- ☐ **Express Feelings in a Journal:** Writing down what you feel can help process anger and identify triggers.
- ☐ **Talk to Someone:** Sharing your feelings with a trusted friend or family member can provide relief and perspective.
- ☐ **Seek Solutions:** Instead of focusing on what made you mad, look for solutions to the issue.
- ☐ **Creative Outlet:** Channel your anger into something creative like painting, writing, or gardening.
- ☐ **Think Before You Speak:** Take a moment to collect your thoughts before saying something you might regret.
- ☐ **Visualize a Calm Place:** Imagining a peaceful scene can help soothe feelings of anger.
- ☐ **Limit Exposure to Triggers:** If possible, reduce contact with people or situations that trigger anger.
- ☐ _____

- List supportive individuals or professional resources you can turn to when managing your anger, including therapists, support groups, or trusted friends.

- Identify strategies for addressing the underlying causes of your anger.

Fear Facing

1. Identifying Your Fears

- Write down all the fears you have regarding infertility, no matter how big or small they seem. (e.g., *Never being able to become a parent, The financial burden of fertility treatments, Strain on my relationship due to infertility struggles, etc.*)
- Rate each fear on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the most intense, to prioritize which fears impact you the most.
- For each fear listed, describe why it scares you. What is it about this fear that impacts you deeply?

Fear	Rate	Why it scares you

2. Understanding Your Fears

- Reflect on whether past experiences or influences might be feeding into these fears. Consider family history, past disappointments, or societal messages.

3. Confronting and Challenging Your Fears

- Identify evidence or reasons why each fear might not come true or is not as threatening as it seems. For each fear, list coping strategies or supportive actions you can take.

Fear	Challenging your fear	Coping strategies
<i>e.g., Never being able to become a parent.</i>	<i>Many people have successfully become parents through various means, including treatment, adoption, and surrogacy.</i>	<i>Research all possible paths to parenthood, including adoption and foster care, to understand all options.</i>

Challenge Negative Thoughts

1. Identifying Negative Thoughts

- List specific situations or comments that trigger negative thoughts related to your infertility journey. For each trigger identified, write down the negative thoughts that arise.

Trigger	Negative Thought
<i>e.g., Seeing a pregnancy announcement on social media</i>	<i>"Everyone else can easily have a child except us. Maybe we're not meant to be parents."</i>

2. Analyzing Negative Thoughts

For each negative thought identified, think of evidence that support and contradict (i.e., might not be entirely true or is exaggerated) this thought:

Evidence Supporting the Thought	Evidence Against the Thought
<i>e.g., It feels like we're constantly surrounded by pregnancy announcements, which highlights our struggles.</i>	<i>Our worth or destiny as potential parents is not determined by the ease or speed with which we can conceive compared to others.</i>

3. Alternative Perspective:

- Is there a different way to view this situation that is less negative and more balanced?

- Plan how you will remind yourself of these balanced statements when you encounter triggers. The following are some suggestions. Check off the ones that may be helpful or add more to the list:

- ☐ **Reminder Notes:** Write down your balanced statements on sticky notes and place them in areas you frequently see—your bathroom mirror, computer monitor, or the background on your phone.
- ☐ **Journaling: Keep** a journal where you record triggers as they happen and actively rewrite the narrative.
- ☐ **Buddy System:** Share your balanced statements with a close friend or your partner. Ask them to remind you of these perspectives when you're feeling down or after encountering a trigger.
- ☐ **Meditation and Visualization:** Incorporate your balanced statements into your meditation or visualization practices. Visualize scenarios where you successfully cope with triggers.
- ☐ **Wear a Reminder:** Choose a piece of jewelry or a small item to carry in your pocket as a physical reminder. Whenever you touch or see it, let it serve as a cue to affirm your balanced statements.
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Couples' Connection

1. Communication

- Each partner writes down their feelings about the infertility journey, focusing on emotions that have been challenging to express.

- Take turns sharing your feelings. The listening partner practices active listening, reflecting back what they heard without offering advice or judgment.

- Each partner lists specific ways they need to be communicated with during this time (e.g., more check-ins, space to vent, reassurance).

2. Understanding and Empathy

- Each partner writes a brief narrative from the other's perspective about their experience with infertility, aiming to capture their partner's emotions and challenges.

- Share your empathy maps with each other. Discuss what you learned about each other's experiences and how you can apply this understanding moving forward.

- Together, create a list of aspects of your partner you are grateful for, focusing on qualities that have been especially important during the infertility journey.

3. Support System

- Schedule regular check-ins to discuss how supported each partner feels and adjust the support plan as needed. The following are some check-in questions you may use:

- ☐ How are you feeling today, both physically and emotionally?
- ☐ How have your stress levels been, and what's been affecting them?
- ☐ In what ways can I support you better? Are there specific actions or words that you find comforting?
- ☐ Are there conversations you've been avoiding that we should have?
- ☐ Are there activities or experiences you think could help us feel more connected?
- ☐ Is there anything you miss about our relationship from before we started this journey that you'd like to bring back?

- ☐ Aside from our infertility journey, what personal goals would you like to focus on?

4. Maintaining Connection

- Brainstorm activities that you both enjoy and can do together, aiming to strengthen your bond and create positive experiences outside of the infertility journey.

- Discuss ways to maintain or enhance intimacy during this challenging time, respecting each partner's emotional and physical comfort levels.

- Share your hopes and dreams for the future, both related and unrelated to parenthood. Discuss how you can support each other in achieving these goals.

Communicating Your Needs

1. Identifying Your Needs

- Reflect on what emotional support you need. This might include empathy, patience, or simply a listening ear.

- Consider the practical support that would help you. This could involve assistance with medical appointments or help with research on infertility treatments.

- Identify any physical support or accommodations you might need, such as rest or dietary considerations.

- Reflect on your social needs, including the desire for privacy or the need to talk openly with friends or support groups.

2. Communicating Your Needs

- To Your Partner:

- Write a message to your partner expressing a key need. Use "I" statements to convey your feelings and desires without assigning blame.

- Example: "I feel overwhelmed with the treatment schedule and need us to work together on managing it. Can we sit down and plan this out together?"

- To Family and Friends:

- Write a message for family and friends that outlines a boundary or request for support.

- Example: "We appreciate your concern and love. Right now, we need space to process our journey and will share updates when we're ready."

- To Healthcare Providers:

- Prepare questions or statements that articulate your informational or treatment-related needs to your healthcare provider.

- Example: "Can you explain the benefits and risks of this treatment in detail? I need to understand all aspects to make an informed decision."

Boundary Setting

1. Identifying Boundary Needs

- **Emotional Boundaries:** Identify situations where you need to protect your emotional well-being. What topics or comments are you not willing to discuss with others?

- *Example: "I need to avoid in-depth discussions about others' pregnancy news."*

- **Informational Boundaries:** Determine what information about your infertility journey you are comfortable sharing and with whom.

- *Example: "We choose to share treatment updates only with our closest family and friends."*

- **Time and Energy Boundaries:** Reflect on how you want to allocate your time and energy, particularly regarding fertility treatments, social engagements, and self-care.

- *Example: "We need to reserve our weekends for rest and activities that replenish us, not overbook with social commitments."*

- **Physical Boundaries:** Consider if there are physical boundaries you need to establish, such as deciding who accompanies you to appointments or how you manage physical reminders of infertility.

- *Example: "I prefer going to certain appointments alone to process the information in my own space."*

- **Digital and Social Media Boundaries:** Think about your engagement with digital spaces and social media. How do you want to manage exposure to potential triggers?

- *Example: "We will unfollow or mute social media accounts that consistently post about pregnancy or infant-related content."*

2. Communicating Boundaries

- For each type of boundary identified above, write a script or key points on how you will communicate this boundary to others.

- *Example: "We appreciate your support and understand your curiosity, but we're not comfortable discussing our fertility treatments in detail right now."*

- Consider possible reactions from others to your boundaries and plan how you will respond to maintain your boundaries while keeping the conversation respectful.

- *Example: "If someone insists on asking for details, we will kindly repeat our need for privacy and change the subject."*

3. Respecting Your Own Boundaries

- Reflect on how you will respect and enforce these boundaries in your own actions and decisions.

- *Example: "If we feel overwhelmed by a social situation, we will give ourselves permission to leave early."*

Handling Social Situations

1. Identifying Challenges

- List social situations or questions that have triggered discomfort or emotional pain in the past related to your infertility journey.

- For each trigger listed, note the emotions you typically experience (e.g., sadness, frustration, isolation).

- Reflect on social settings or groups that have felt supportive versus those that have not. What differentiates them?

2. Preparing Responses

- For common triggers or questions, prepare respectful but firm responses that you can use to deflect or address the situation.

- *Example: When asked, "When are you two planning to have kids?" a response could be, "We appreciate your interest in our family. Right now, we're focusing on our journey together and will share updates when we feel ready."*

- Plan polite ways to excuse yourself from a conversation or situation if it becomes too overwhelming.

- *Example: "Excuse me, I need to get some fresh air. Let's catch up later."*

4. Cultivating Supportive Environments

- Consider if and how you might want to educate close friends or family about infertility to create a more supportive environment.

- *Example: Sharing articles or resources that explain what infertility is and how best to support someone going through it.*

Finding Support Groups

1. Identifying Your Needs

- Reflect on the type of support you're seeking (emotional, informational, both) and the ideal format for you (in-person, online, hybrid).

- List specific aspects of infertility you wish to explore or discuss in a support group (e.g., IVF experiences, coping strategies, male infertility).

- Consider if there are specific cultural, religious, or personal identity factors that are important for you in finding a supportive environment.

2. Researching Options

- Use online search engines, social media platforms, and fertility clinic resources to compile a list of potential support groups.
- For each group found, note the focus, size, meeting frequency, and any membership requirements.
- Look for reviews or testimonials from current or past members to gauge the group's atmosphere and effectiveness.

The following are some suggestions:

[IVF Support Group Facebook page:](#) With more than 78,6k members, the IVF Support Group is a large Facebook community for those who have been through or are currently going through IVF.

[The Bump: Infertility:](#) This forum hosted by The Bump has a message board dedicated to hundreds of different infertility and IVF topics.

[Infertility Support Group on DailyStrength:](#) A small community of approximately 2,800 members, for those beginning their journey with IVF and needing support.

[RESOLVE: Male Perspective:](#) This group is geared toward the male perspective of infertility challenges.

3. Reflecting on the Experience

- After attending a meeting or engaging with group content, jot down your initial impressions and feelings.

- List the benefits you believe you could gain from joining the group and any concerns you might have.

Coping Mechanisms Inventory

1. Identifying Coping Mechanisms

- Write down all the coping mechanisms you've used to deal with infertility-related stress, both healthy and unhealthy.

Coping Mechanism	Effectiveness Rate (1-10)	Healthiness (positive, neutral, or negative)
e.g., Binge-watching TV shows	5	Neutral to Negative (depending on duration and impact on daily responsibilities)

2. Reflecting on Patterns

- Review your inventory and note any patterns. Do you lean more towards healthy or unhealthy coping mechanisms?

- Are there specific situations or triggers that prompt you to use certain coping mechanisms over others?

3. Exploring Alternatives

- Based on your current needs and the effectiveness of your existing strategies, list new coping mechanisms you're interested in trying. The following are some suggestions. Check off the ones that may be helpful or add more to the list:

- ☐ **Regular Exercise:** Engage in physical activities you enjoy to reduce stress and improve well-being.
- ☐ **Journaling:** Write about your feelings and experiences to process emotions.
- ☐ **Support Groups:** Join infertility support groups to share experiences and gain emotional support.
- ☐ **Creative Expression:** Use art, music, or writing as outlets for expressing and coping with feelings.

- ☐ **Deep Breathing Exercises:** Use breathing techniques to manage moments of stress and anxiety.
- ☐ **Quality Time with Partner:** Dedicate time to enjoy activities together that are not related to fertility.
- ☐ **Reading:** Read books for pleasure or about coping strategies to distract and educate yourself.
- ☐ **Gratitude Journal:** Daily list things you're grateful for to shift focus to positive aspects of life.
- ☐ **Laughter Therapy:** Watch comedies or engage in activities that make you laugh to relieve stress.
- ☐ **Nature Walks:** Spend time outdoors to connect with nature and improve mood.
- ☐ **Scheduled Self-Care:** Regularly schedule activities that promote self-care and relaxation.
- ☐ **Volunteering:** Engage in volunteer work to find purpose and shift focus from personal struggles.
- ☐ **Gardening:** Spend time gardening to reduce stress and foster a sense of accomplishment.
- ☐ **Pet Therapy:** Spend quality time with pets for comfort and stress relief.
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Alternative Paths to Parenthood

1. Identifying Your Desires

- Describe what being a parent means to you. What aspects of parenthood are most important to you?

2. Researching Alternative Paths

For each alternative path listed below, research and fill in the details based on your interest and situation.

Alternative	Process	Pros	Cons	Personal Interest Level (1-10)
Adoption				
Surrogacy				
Donor Eggs/Sperm				

Fostering				
Child-Free Living				
Other				

3. Evaluating Emotional and Practical Considerations

- For each path, evaluate your emotional readiness and concerns. Consider how each option aligns with your initial vision of parenthood.

- Consider the practical aspects, such as financial implications, legal requirements, and lifestyle changes for each path.

4. Discussing and Decision Making

- Prepare a list of key points and questions to discuss with your partner or a support person. This could include feelings about each option, preferences, and any deal-breakers.

- Note any professionals (fertility counselors, adoption agencies, legal advisors) you may need to consult for more information.

Life Planning Beyond Infertility

1. Reflecting on Values and Desires

- What principles guide your life and decisions?

- Identify desires and dreams unrelated to parenthood. This could include career goals, travel, hobbies, or personal achievements.

- Reflect on what brings you satisfaction and joy. Consider relationships, activities, and personal growth areas.

2. Envisioning Your Future

- Describe your vision for a fulfilling life. Include aspects like career, relationships, personal interests, and lifestyle.

- Set specific, achievable goals for the near future that align with your values and life vision.

- Acknowledge potential challenges to achieving your vision and goals. Consider emotional, practical, and relational aspects.

- Develop strategies for coping with setbacks or challenges. This could include self-care practices, seeking professional support, or turning to your support system.

2026 Clinical Alignment

DSM-5-TR (including Sept. 2025 update) · ICD-11 CDDR / 2026 MMS

Classification status

- DSM-5-TR: No diagnosis under this title · No diagnosis is established by the title.
- ICD-11 CDDR: · No diagnosis is established by the title.
- This workbook is non-diagnostic. A title, checklist, or completed activity never establishes a diagnosis.

Pages requiring the updated interpretation

- The audit identified source pages 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 36. The statements below supersede incompatible diagnostic, scoring, safety, or resource wording on those pages.

Diagnostic and differential limits

- Assess duration, distress/functional impairment, cultural and medical context, substance/medication effects, and relevant differential diagnoses before assigning any diagnosis.

Document-specific corrections

- Pages [2, 4, 8, 11] · Frame · Infertility Emotional Support· using the DSM/ICD status below; add duration, impairment, exclusions, and differentials without reproducing criteria. The title alone must never be treated as a diagnosis.
- Pages [1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 12, 16] · Treat the Infertility Emotional Support ratings/checklists as author-created reflection tools only. Remove unsupported severity bands, cutoffs, totals, or language suggesting diagnostic validity; label response anchors and recall period explicitly.
- Pages [2, 6, 8, 10, 12, 13, 20, 21, 22, 23, 27, 29, 30, 31] · Psychological exercises must not replace reproductive-health or medical assessment. Review medications, hormonal/medical contributors, pain, sleep, fertility-treatment effects, pregnancy status, and acute mood risk with appropriately qualified professionals. Apply this specifically to the workbook's Self-Assessment, Identifying Your Emotions, Grief Processing, Anger Management sections.
- Pages [1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 36]
 - Review all medical assertions in Infertility Emotional Support with a qualified medical professional; distinguish psychoeducation from individualized advice and add referral thresholds, contraindications, and medication/procedure cautions appropriate to this population.

Measures, scoring, and permissions

- Treat the Infertility Emotional Support ratings/checklists as author-created reflection tools only. Remove unsupported severity bands, cutoffs, totals, or language suggesting diagnostic validity; label response anchors and recall period explicitly. custom/unvalidated unless evidence is supplied confirm no third-party item wording was adapted

Intervention scope and contraindications

- Psychological exercises must not replace reproductive-health or medical assessment. Review medications, hormonal/medical contributors, pain, sleep, fertility-treatment effects, pregnancy status, and acute mood risk with appropriately qualified professionals.
- Screen with validated instruments only when administration and interpretation are appropriate; assess bipolar disorder, psychosis, suicidality, medical contributors, medication issues, and risk to dependents where relevant.

Crisis and current resources

- For immediate danger or a medical emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department. In the U.S., call or text 988 or use 988lifeline.org. Outside the U.S., use verified local emergency and crisis services. A workbook is not a crisis service or safety plan.

Authoritative references

- <https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/practice/dsm/updates-to-dsm/updates-to-dsm-5-tr-criteria-text>
- <https://icd.who.int/browse/2026-01/mms/en>
- <https://www.acog.org/programs/perinatal-mental-health/patient-screening>
- <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240077263>

2026 Clinical Alignment

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- <https://988lifeline.org/>
- <https://www.acog.org/clinical/clinical-guidance/clinical-practice-guideline/articles/2023/06/screening-and-diagnosis-of-mental-health-conditions-during-pregnancy-and-postpartum>