

**Erin Miserlis**

Local psychologist draws on experience with infertility to help others

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San Diego based Clinical Psychologist, Dr. Karen Hall, began her counseling career with the U.S. Navy in 1995. This is a long way from the field of infertility she specializes in today. In 2001 Dr. Hall retired from the Navy with the hopes of starting a family. She took a job working for the V.A. (Veteran's Affairs) and spent the next four years trying to get pregnant.

While struggling with infertility, Dr. Hall found it difficult to find proper emotional support. These feelings had a lasting impact and in 2004 she decided to open her own practice to help fix this emotional void for others. Dr. Hall describes working with infertility patients as a very fulfilling practice. "There is great satisfaction following couples through this process. In this specialty, there is always a resolution one way or another." Dr. Hall's practice is made up primarily of individuals and couples dealing with infertility as well as issues related to third party reproduction.



Karen Hall, Ph.D.
Photo: Karen Hall

Dr. Hall offers insight on some of the most common issues faced by couples dealing with infertility:

1. Coping Skills and Communication - One of the biggest problems for couples dealing with infertility is managing different coping skills and means of communication. One partner may want to repeatedly talk about what they are going through while the other may distract themselves with other tasks. With these two distinct coping styles, conflict is inevitable. The result is one person ends up not feeling heard and the other feels useless, unable to fix their partner's problem. Structure the communication so it is predictable for the other partner. Set up a specific time to talk and allow them to be drawn in and respect the different ways of coping.

2. "I'm Ready for the Next Step, Why Aren't You?" - Couples are often at different places emotionally with their treatment. While one partner may be ready to move on the other may not be. To help combat these communication issues, Dr. Hall recommends slowing down the treatment process when necessary. It helps to realize that each partner will come to a resolution in their own time. Acknowledge that the other partner is not there yet and let them get their when they are ready.

3. Recognize that Infertility is One of the Biggest Life Crises You Will Face – Many couples get discouraged during this time and begin questioning their relationship. You are not the people you used to be but can get back there. Protect yourself and know your limits. If necessary, avoid child focused gatherings and be patient. Don't have the same expectations of yourself as before.

4. "Just Relax" – Comments such as these can be hard to handle when caught off guard. They come from a place of not understanding the pain of infertility and aren't meant to be hurtful. Find a response for situations such as these and you'll be prepared. Think about what works for you and create some sample answers to help navigate through uncomfortable social settings.

5. Coping with Repeated Pregnancy Loss – For women who finally become pregnant it is common to experience anxiety. After so much disappointment it is hard not to expect something to go wrong. Be mindful of your thoughts and just be present in the moment.

Try not to think of the past or the future. If the loss is associated with miscarriage the individual needs to be especially good to themselves. Be sure to allow yourself the time to mourn before moving on to try again. Give your body a break and your mind the time to process the loss.

Finally, Dr. Hall stresses the importance of seeking out support. Depression rates are often higher for women dealing with infertility and it's critical to recognize the [signs and symptoms](#). To learn more about how you can cope with infertility visit [Dr. Hall's website](#) or the [American Society of Reproductive Medicine \(ASRM\)](#) for a list of reputable doctors in your area.



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