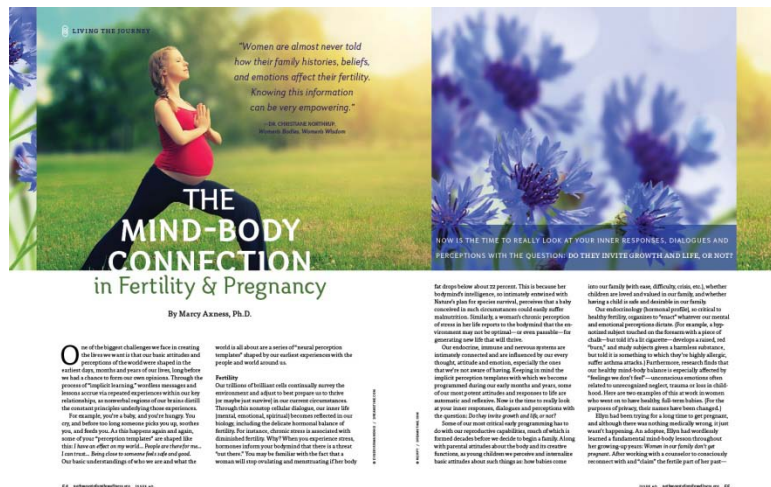


The Mind-Body Connection in Fertility and Pregnancy

By Marcy Axness, PhD
Pathways #40, page 54



Talking Points

- ❖ In an excerpt of her book *Parenting for Peace: Raising the Next Generation of Peacemakers*, Marcy Axness explains the ways in which our mental, emotional and spiritual experiences, from infancy on, are “reflected in our biology, including the delicate hormonal balance of fertility.” Our body and mind are intimately connected in ways that are not always consciously clear. Outside factors, like stressful experiences, “feelings we don’t feel,” or chronic fears and anxieties, can directly affect physiological process in our endocrine, immune and nervous systems, and play a role in fertility and pregnancy.
- ❖ Axness explains how our basic attitudes and perceptions are shaped very early in our human experience. Through “implicit learning,” non-verbal regions in our brains are distilling experiences and interpreting them. When a baby cries and someone picks them up, they might perceive positive basic understandings of safety or trust. These continuous experiences create a connection between our mind and body that might be unconscious but very physiologically real.
- ❖ Axness advises that “now is the time to really look at your inner responses, dialogues and perceptions with the question: *Do they invite growth and life, or not?*” (55)
- ❖ Our early understanding of the body, its functions, birth, and the perception of how children are valued in our family can all influence our reproductive capabilities. Our most unacknowledged assumptions or feelings about the world – “unconscious emotions often related to unrecognized neglect, trauma or loss in childhood” — can affect our bodymind. (55)
- ❖ Two examples of women who experienced infertility clarify this point. The first was a woman who herself was adopted. She had “wordlessly learned a fundamental mind-body lesson throughout her growing-up years: *Women in our family don’t get pregnant.*” After working with a counselor, she was able to conceive. The second woman addressed her family history of immigration and feeling “left behind.”
- ❖ Axness suggests “some inner investigation into the invisible answers you may be carrying to basic questions about how fertility, pregnancy, birth and children were perceived in your family

of origin, so that you can journey into those realms fully free, right down to your biochemistry, and make the healthiest choices.” (56) This process will also be great preparation for parenting, not just for pregnancy! (See *Pathways* 39, Theresa Graham-Brett’s “Parenting as the Practice of Freedom”)

- ❖ The experiences of the pregnant mom can also influence the fetal bodymind connection. Therefore, Axness argues how important it is “for the pregnant mother to feel supported, loved, safe—and most especially, to experience joy—so their baby can arrive as healthy as possible, ready to love and learn.” (56)

Resources

Full references for each article are available at <http://pathwaystofamilywellness.org/references.html>

A great collection of resources for anyone dealing with infertility, particularly when stress and other emotional issues impact fertility - www.infertilitymindbody.com/resources.htm

Tara Parker-Pope. “Lowering Stress Improves Fertility Treatment.” *Go Home Be Well*. New York Times Health and Science Online. May 10, 2011. well.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/05/10/lowering-stress-improves-fertility-treatment

Natural Fertility Info - natural-fertility-info.com/mind-body-conceive.html