



# Discernment as a couple

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## Coming from different places

Discerning next steps can be challenging enough on your own, but discerning as a married couple is sometimes even harder. When it comes to an infertility journey, there are many big and small decisions and spouses aren't always on the same page. One may be ready to go down the medical route for investigating root causes and treatments, while the other is not comfortable moving forward with something so invasive. One may feel strongly called to pursue adoption or foster care, while the other may feel deeply uncomfortable with the idea. Some may disagree with their spouse on whether or not to follow Catholic teaching regarding IVF. Working together to discern the next steps that align with our Catholic faith and meet the comfort levels and callings of both spouses can be a challenge. This resource will provide you with the tools for having constructive and holy conversations.

## Creating your “couple’s discernment plan”

### ★ Pray

Pray both individually and as a couple. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you wisdom, insight and clarity about God's will for you. Pray for the gifts of charity and understanding towards your spouse as you seek to support and love each other while seeking God's will.

### ★ Know Church teaching

We are responsible for forming our own conscience and knowing what the Church teaches regarding moral and immoral approaches to dealing with infertility and growing our families. Take time to research this.

### ★ Reflect on where you personally feel called and comfortable

Take some time on your own to write down where you feel God calling you next. (If you need more guidance for this step, please see our resource “[Discerning the next best step](#)”.) Don't overcomplicate it: if you feel strongly pulled towards adoption, write that down. If you can't stomach the thought of another medical appointment or blood draw, make sure to jot down pausing or stopping medical treatment. Have your spouse take the time to do a similar reflection exercise. Your next step could be stopping something, pursuing something, or continuing what you're currently doing.

### ★ Identify underlying desires

If you want to pursue [NaPro](#) treatments, your underlying desire might be becoming pregnant and having a biological child. If you want to pursue adoption, your underlying desire might be to be a parent and provide a loving home for a child. If you want to pause

infertility treatments or take a break from pursuing adoption, the underlying desire may be to bring peace and stability to your mental health, marriage and home.

★ **Share with your spouse**

It's important to take turns giving each other the floor. When it's your turn to share, your spouse should let you speak without interruption; when you're finished, they can ask clarifying questions. When it's your spouse's turn to share, it's your job to listen without interrupting or interjecting with disagreements or trying to change their mind, saving clarifying questions for when they have finished sharing. Make sure you each share what your underlying desire is that drives the next step you would like to take. Even if your spouse suggests pursuing something counter to Church teaching, it is important to hear what their underlying desire is. For example, they may share that they want to pursue IVF because their underlying desire is to have a biological child. While IVF is not something you can agree to as a Catholic, it is very important to acknowledge and validate their beautiful desire to have a biological child with you.

★ **Notice your feelings, identify and share underlying concerns**

Once you've listened to each other, take a quiet step back to notice how you feel about what your spouse said. Are you excited, angry, anxious, defensive? Next, get curious about *why* you feel this way. For example, if your spouse brings up pursuing IVF and you feel anxious, this anxiety is likely coming from recognizing this would be an immoral action that you know you cannot take. Perhaps your spouse wants to pursue adoption and you feel anxious, and you realize the anxiety is coming from a fear of how you might manage that financially. Lovingly share your concerns with your spouse and lovingly *listen* to your spouse's concerns. Make sure to validate each other's concerns without being dismissive or defensive. Validate first *before* offering suggestions that address their concerns. This might sound like: "Yes, that's a good point. Adoption can be very expensive. Being prudent with our finances is important to me too" or "Yes, I remember how taxing all of the bloodwork and scans were for you the last time. Whatever we do, I want to make sure you are mentally, physically and emotionally in a good place."

★ **Look for possibilities**

After chatting together and putting all of your cards on the table, look together at what is possible. Look for opportunities that might meet both of your underlying desires, callings and comfort levels. Look for options that address concerns each of you hold. For example, if you want to pursue medical treatment but your spouse is concerned that it will bring a lot of tension and stress to the household, you might both feel comfortable with the option of pursuing 3 months of medical treatments followed by a 2- or 3-month break. If you want to pursue adoption but your spouse is not comfortable, perhaps they would be willing to attend an informational meeting or speak to a couple you know who has adoption experience and see if those concerns remain. Or perhaps you don't agree on becoming full-time foster parents, but you would both be interested in providing respite to a foster family a few times a year, or your spouse would be willing to support you becoming a volunteer within the foster care system.. If your spouse wants to pursue IVF, an alternative you might consider is finding a NaPro doctor to walk you through medical treatments that are morally permissible as a Catholic.

### ★ **Reconnect**

Discernment conversations can be heavy and exhausting. Make sure to plan and take time for an activity that allows you to connect with each other without having to discuss or think about any of the items from your discernment discussion. Invest in each other and have fun together. This is crucial for the health of your marriage and for giving you the strength to continue in this journey together.

### ★ **Ongoing conversation, prayer and discernment**

Discerning as a couple is never a “one and done” exercise. Continue to pray separately and together. Continue to share your concerns and desires with each other. Make sure to frequently check in with each other to be sure that the path you agreed on together is still one they feel comfortable with and reassess as you go.

## **Links to assist you in the discernment process**

<https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/reproductive-technology/begotten-not-made-a-catholic-view-of-reproductive-technology>

<https://www.usccb.org/topics/natural-family-planning/infertility>

<https://www.thefruitfulhollow.com/naprotechnology>

# OUR “COUPLE’S DISCERNMENT” PLAN

## Example

### What we are trying to discern:

*Whether we should continue NaPro treatments*

### Our prayer:

*God, please give us wisdom and inspiration as to the direction you are calling us as a couple.*

### Identify any Church teachings on this subject:

*The Church is supportive of us using fertility medication, going for ultrasounds and tracking my cycles for our best chances at conception.*

<b>My perspective</b>	
Where I feel called (any strong “yes” or “no” feelings): <i>Our last round of NaPro treatments left me emotionally and physically depleted and took a toll on us as a couple. I feel God calling me to respect my health and take a step back to take better care of myself and our marriage.</i>	
My underlying desire: <i>To feel physically, mentally and emotionally stable again. For us to be able to reconnect as a couple.</i>	
My spouse’s reaction to what I’ve shared: <i>He is concerned me feeling the need to pull back would mean we would not be trying to conceive anymore at all - he still very much wants the opportunity for us to get pregnant.</i>	How these concerns can be addressed: <i>I let him know that my biggest concern is the toll of the bloodwork, medical appointments and side effects of medications, not so much the timing of sex with my cycle (although that’s been draining as well).</i>

<b>My spouse's perspective</b>	
Where my spouse feels called (any strong "yes" or "no" feelings): <i>He still feels called to try to have biological children. He is not interested in pursuing adoption. He is willing to continue taking whatever supplements he needs and for us to keep trying to conceive but also is concerned for my mental health in the process as well - he is worried about me.</i>	
His underlying desire: <i>To be a father. For his wife to feel well mentally &amp; physically.</i>	
My reaction to what my spouse shared: <i>Does this mean he wouldn't be happy unless we were using all fertile days for TTC, and me continuing to go for regular bloodwork and taking trigger shots and fertility medication? Does he expect us to go another year like this?</i>	How these concerns can be addressed: <i>Ask husband to chat about what TTC in a more balanced way would look like to him?</i>

**Possibilities for us to explore + next steps**

*We have decided to take a 3-month break from all medications, appointments and anything TTC related. Then we will check in with each other and see if we both would be willing to start TTC again simply by charting my cycle and taking supplements for 3 months. Then, if I am feeling mentally better, we will consider 3 months of fertility meds, trigger shots and ultrasounds followed by a 3-month break. If I'm not feeling emotionally ready to jump back into everything, we will consider TTC without extra medical help. We discussed asking our doctor if we can skip follow-up bloodwork for the coming year, since my results have been fairly consistent, and we decided to take a break from Creighton follow-up appointments to cut down on the number of appointments. We discussed asking if ultrasounds are still necessary and if other meds may have fewer side effects.*

**Reconnection plan**

*Go on a hike and visit a new cafe this weekend. Plan a weekend away for some time in the next 3 months.*

**Future prayer and discernment**

*We commit to praying together every evening. We will have another discernment chat in 3 months. We promise to have a direct check-in every few months to see how we are feeling.*

# OUR “COUPLE’S DISCERNMENT” PLAN

## Your turn

**What we are trying to discern:**

**Our prayer:**

**Identify any Church teachings on this subject:**

<b>My perspective</b>	
Where I feel called (any strong “yes” or “no” feelings):	
My underlying desire:	
My spouse’s reaction to what I’ve shared:	How these concerns can be addressed:

<b>My spouse's perspective</b>	
Where my spouse feels called (any strong "yes" or "no" feelings):	
His underlying desire:	
My reaction to what my spouse shared:	How these concerns can be addressed:

**Possibilities for us to explore + next steps**

**Reconnection plan**

**Future prayer and discernment**