

## ***Building a Birth ( Labor Coping) Plan***

A Birth Plan is essentially a list of your preferences – more of a birth “wish list” rather than a script. Creating a birth plan is an excellent means by which to educate yourself about childbirth and become more familiar with your options...so much more so than being given a photocopied worksheet at one of your prenatal visits and just crossing off what you don't want! A birth plan should be well thought out and concise, clearly indicate your preferences as well as your intention to take responsibility for your own birth experience. This is not to say that your birth plan will be followed to the tee – complications may arise and flexibility is definitely necessary - but a written birth plan does provide your attendant and the staff at the hospital or birthing center you have chosen a clear idea of what you want out of your birth experience and that you expect your desires to be respected. It is your birth, after all!

Most doulas and childbirth educators will be happy to help you create your plan, and you should definitely include your doctor and midwife in the process.

### **Things to Consider When Creating your Birth Plan**

- This birth experience belongs to you, your partner and your baby!
- Your attendant should respect your wishes and fully discuss with you any issues that will affect your birth experience.
- Consider remaining at home until labor sets in, as long as you take certain precautions and there are no signs of infection (discuss with midwife or OB).
- Some hospital procedures, such as routine IVs and continuous EFM, limit your ability to move and may confine you to bed. Walking and changing position will encourage labor to progress...lying in bed won't.
- Specify whether or not you are comfortable with having your labor and delivery observed by students or residents.
- Music, dimmed lights and respectfully lowered voices can help make the environment more relaxing.
- Do you want anyone to take pictures or videotape this experience? See if the hospital or birthing center you've chosen allows this.



- Make sure your partner will be allowed to stay with you throughout your labor and delivery. Be sure to specify whom else you'd like with you.
- Internal exams increase the risk of infection. It's a good idea to keep them limited to the minimum necessary.
- If you are planning a natural birth, it's a good idea to let the staff know so they can support your decision.
- Massage, guided relaxation, baths and showers, change in position, walking and rocking all help to ease discomfort.
- Birthing lying flat in a bed is the worst possible position. Try squatting using a birthing bar, hands and knees and semi-sitting...you might even want access to a birthing tub.
- Let your attendants know what coaching style you prefer (Bradley, Lamaze, HypnoBirthing etc).
- Specify if you'd rather not have a time limit on pushing. Sometimes, a change of position is all you need to get things moving!
- Specify whether or not you would like an episiotomy. Perineal massage and warm compresses stretch the perineum, reducing the risk of tearing.
- Consider requesting that newborn procedures be delayed until after you have time to bond with your baby.
- You can request that the placenta can be delivered without assistance.
- ABOVE ALL, you have the right to refuse ANY routine procedures that you are uncomfortable with, or to request a second opinion on any proposed interventions.

#### **In the Event of a Cesarean:**

- Request that your partner be allowed to remain by your side.
- Make sure that the procedure is explained to you step-by-step. This will help you to feel like you are actually participating in the birth of your child, rather than just having him or her removed from your body.
- You can request to be allowed some sort of physical contact with your baby following delivery. This is so important to the mother's emotional well being!
- Your partner should be allowed to stay with your newborn at ALL TIMES!
- You can ask that separation from your child be minimal.

#### **Postpartum & Neonatal Care:**

- If you plan to breastfeed, make sure the staff is supportive of your decision and find out there a lactation consultant available. Do not allow you infant to be given bottles of sugar water or formula or a pacifier.
- The sooner you establish breastfeeding, the better!
- You should be given some sort of nutritious food and drink as soon as possible.
- The natural vernix will continue to soften your baby's skin and does not need to be removed by bathing. Whether or not your child is bathed should be your decision.
- Most hospitals allow husbands to stay with you for 24 hours a day. Make sure you are aware of the hospital policies on visitation of other family and friends.



**In the event your baby needs specialized medical care:**

- If you baby needs to be transported to another facility, make sure you or your partner is able to accompany your baby.
- If you a breastfeeding, you can ask to breastfeed or express milk to be given to your baby.
- Ask to be as involved as possible with your baby's care.
- You can request that your own postpartum stay be as short as possible so you can spend more time with your baby.

**Informed Consent Questions**

Here is a list of questions to ask when interventions or unplanned procedures are proposed at any point during your pregnancy or the birth of your child:

- Is this an emergency or do we have time to talk?
- What are the benefits of doing this?
- What are the risks of doing this?

- If we do this, what other procedures or treatments might we need as a result?
- What else can we try first or instead?
- What would happen if we waited before doing this?
- What would happen if we didn't do this at all?