

Preparation for Birth Partners

Supporting a woman through birth is its own challenge/skill. With preparation your support will make a huge positive difference! Both your beliefs and your understanding of how to support labor will impact your effectiveness, as well as your understanding of the birth mother. This guide will help you learn what you need to know about all three, and reflect on how to put them to optimal use!

Insights Into Myself

Having and sharing our own goals for the birth experience can be meaningful for birth moms to be aware of, while they also need to take a back seat to her needs and what the labor calls for.

What are some of your personal hopes, and how do they fit into the plans for the labor?

How is being at the birth relevant to my process of becoming a parent or growing as a person and a partner/friend?

How do I open to my own experience while primarily being in a support position?

Beliefs change things. When strong doubts or worry are present in the birth room labor it can undermine mom's confidence and sense of safety and poorly influence the birth. When strong positive beliefs are present and reflected to mom they have the power to keep her going and smooth the way for birth to proceed!

Do I believe birth will go well for us?

What concerns do I have? What may worry me in labor?

Do I trust our care providers to monitor the safety and health of birth and to prevent or manage any problems that arise?

What would increase my confidence?

Do I believe in mom? Do I believe she can do it?

Do I believe she will be OK?

What are my feelings about my inability to control birth or take the pain away? What are the most constructive thoughts I can have about this?

Labor proceeds best if mom is calm, distracted, and resting when necessary. Excitement, fear, and over-active hovering (even if well meant!) can create stalls in labor.

How does my calm affect mom? How does my worry affect mom? How does my strength and confidence affect her? How does my love affect her?

What will I be thinking, feeling, and doing in early labor? In active labor (the intense part)?

When I feel stressed, I can remain calm by:

Labor can be long. I can prevent my own exhaustion by:

- Catching a nap •
- Taking a walk •
- Eating a good meal •
- Continually snacking/drinking •
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Insights Into How to Help Mom

Mom will need to drink a lot to stay well hydrated and eat lightly as long as possible. How can you help her meet these needs?

Rest is incredibly important during early labor. If mom feels tired before 4 cm, or doesn't feel tired but would typically be sleeping at this time of day, how can you help her prioritize rest above all else?

What does she prefer when she is stressed or in pain? What helps her cope? What are her main needs?

What are her strengths in life? What is she naturally good at (character strengths or otherwise)? How can I encourage her in a way that works for her?

What will "fill her well" and help her feel ready before birth? In other words, what helps her feel calm, confident, nurtured, and at peace?

How am I best able to be a source of comfort and support? Which of my ways of being (protector, lover, companion, etc) help her the most?

How do I best connect to her or encourage her?

Review this list of comfort measures. Mark those you are comfortable offering. Reach out for help learning about any that you do not fully understand.

- Offer comforting words or encouragement, love, and admiration. Calming and loving touches such as a hug, massage, holding hands, or allowing her to rest her head on your chest or in your lap. Share your confidence through encouragement, reassuring touch, and confident eye contact.
- Place a heating pad under belly, on lower back, or across shoulders. (A warmed rice sock works well.)
- Provide warm blankets or socks.
- Apply counter pressure on lower back or hips. Use the knee press to alleviate lower back pain.
- Support mom's body fully with use of a birth ball, large scarf, pillows, hugs, holding, leaning, or different positions. Help her find positions where she can work with the contractions and also relax between them.
- Offer prompts of helpful images mom can visualize, such as a beautiful or safe place, images of swimming/floating or flying, riding on waves or wind, images of strength, love, peace or calm, or images of opening.
- Encourage breaths or vocalizations that are low and long.
- Help mom into the tub or shower.
- Place a cold wash cloth on her face or neck.
- Encourage her to open her hands, eyes, throat, or mouth.
- Take charge: In a moment of panic, step in close, talk her down to a point of reason or calm, help her breathe or count or rock her way through the most intense moments.
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Imagining the Birth Experience

Our thoughts feeling as actions are powerful influence for the types of support we can offer. Consider the impact of the following options.

Feelings

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|---------------|--------------|--------------------|--|---|
| • Worry | • Confidence | • Curious | What feelings of your own will be most <u>helpful for labor?</u> | • |
| • Anxiety | • Belief | • Perseverance | | • |
| • Panic | • Trust | • Transformational | | • |
| • Self-doubt | • Okay | • Awe | | • |
| • Uselessness | • Patient | | | • |

Thoughts

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| • I know she can do this. | • Being here makes a huge difference. | • |
| • She is so amazing. | • What thoughts of your own will be most <u>helpful for labor?</u> | • |
| • All she needs is my love. | | • |
| • My love strengthens her. | | • |
| • My presence is loving and comforting for her. | | • |

Actions

- Verbal encouragement
- Bring water and food
- Read aloud
- Fill a bath
- Listen
- Be attentive
- Provide space
- Stay connected
- Offering comfort in a lap, hug, massage, heat, cold, scents
- Supporting her body so she doesn't have to hold herself up
- Counter pressure on painful spots in the hips and back
- Grounding, comforting or loving touch
- Provide a sense of protection and total support
- Ask for practical help from others
- Get information when questions arise
- Take care of anything she is worried about (other children, pets etc, a nurse that she doesn't click with, lack of information)
- What actions do you believe will be most helpful for labor?
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Making Decisions About Pain Medication

Discuss thoughts and feelings about the subject ahead of time. Offer your concerns, but also truly emphasize trying to understand mom's deepest desires and her reasons. Believe her. Once you have a clear idea of your family preferences and goals, make a list of every reason for your preference. Discuss situations where you would change your mind, and make a little plan for what to do if mom asks for pain medications at a time that does not match with the situations you've planned on. Ask if she wants to be pushed through her doubt and how you can help with that, or if she would rather have you know ahead of time that if she asks for medication she wants it as soon as possible. A mom's thoughts ahead of time about the type of encouragement and support she wants in the face of doubts are usually very accurate to her needs in labor.

Our preference for pain management:

Reasons we prefer this approach:

Situations in which we would change our mind:

The birth mom's desires for how I help her during a moment of doubt: