

Understanding birth plans

Creating a birth plan is ultimately about the process of exploring your birth options and clarifying what is important for you in your birth experience. It leads you to feeling more confident that you have done all you can to communicate your wishes and desire for woman centred collaboration with your birth team.

It needs both your head and heart in the process and it's well worth your effort. It's not setting you up for failure. It's setting up you to be aware of your rights, your choices, your feelings, your thoughts and to help you work with your birth team to create your best birth possible.

Although you don't know what exactly will unfold on the day you give birth, you will have a better sense of control and power because of your engagement in the process of asking for what you want. This can feel uncomfortable for many because we are not used to being respectfully assertive, or even knowing and then asking for what we want! But remember this birth is happening with your body, your baby and you live with the experience! You have a right to decide what is best for you and your family.

The birth plan process expands your ideas on what is possible at a positive and empowering birth. When you dream and imagine an empowering birth (how ever clear or abstract that may seem) you allow your mind and body to explore more actively how to make it happen. That's super exciting! Even if the process or the outcome are not perfect, you feel like an active contributor in how your life unfolds! New mums and dads say they feel more powerful and sense their personal growth from the experience. Your birth can strengthen the foundations that your life as a parent and family will grow from. This is you! Because you are curious and are exploring your options by reading this right now.

It also equalises the power in your birth team. It reminds us that, with respectful communication, the birthing mother and their partner can consider the pros and cons of the different skills, beliefs, practices and attitudes of their different birth team members (self, partner, midwife, doula, doctor etc.) We are relating human to human not just doctor to patient.

So use your pregnancy time to ponder your birth philosophy and what influences your ideas of what is possible. Read up and research about evidence based care and common obstetric interventions. Talk to your partner in depth about what you both want, what your expectations of each other are and how you might navigate your pregnancy and birth experience together in care and consideration of your similarities and differences.

Use your antenatal visits to discuss your birth plan with your care provider (use the checklist as a guide). Find out what most commonly happens in the hospital you're birthing at and how your care provider practices. Aim to understand their perspective on your health care and weigh up what is evidence based and specific to your individual care as opposed to habituated practices.

Going through the process of researching, communicating about and writing your birth plan helps you feel into the emotions that may come up for you when you respectfully assert yourself. During labour this can be hard to do if you don't already have an embodied awareness of your right to make an informed choice and you can consent freely (otherwise it's not consent). It may be helpful to seek emotional support to process, practice and integrate positive emotions into your sense of self during your pregnancy. Just imagine how much easier it will be to speaking up and stay calm so your birthing hormones are not disrupted and your labour can progress more effectively.

Use the check list to prompt you about common practices in maternity care today. Write up a simple end document that you can give to all the people who are a part of your care during labour. Give a copy to your primary care provider. Take a few copies with you to the hospital. Politely ask any new staff to read your birth plan before discussing your care. Naturally an emergency situation compromises this process but do what you can to communicate what is important to you.

If you have other support people with you in labour, such as a doula or friend, the birth plan offers them a point of reference to advocate on your behalf if need be.

Creating a birth plan by doing the preparation during pregnancy means you are more likely to be able navigate your options more calmly and with more confidence. You are more likely to have a team that understands how to best support you and take into considerations your individual needs. It's an empowering practice. It's actually going to reduce your perception of pain and transform it into power. Your birth plan is a formula for a more manageable, quicker and easier birth. And because birth brings a baby into your arms, don't forget that you are practicing a life skill that helps you evolving into an conscious, active, loving parent. You will have more resilience, inner strength, self confidence and heart to trust your parenting instincts and take care of your growing family.

Realise your potential by creating a birth plan and become the birthing mama and papa you want to be!

Enjoy and remember, I am here to support you through this process :)

Birth plan check list

Name and due date

- * State your birth philosophy
- * Who is your birth team: midwife, doctor, doula, other health professionals
- * What involvement of family, friends, children do you want?
- * Where are you birthing: Address of hospital / homebirth
- * What are your diet needs.
- * Are there any spiritual, religious, cultural considerations to be aware of?
- * Do you have health insurance?
- * Make sure your ambulance subscription is up to date.

Going past the expected due date - What are my thoughts on induction?

- * Kick charts
- * Placental function test
- * Natural options to stimulate labour
- * Electronic foetal monitoring
- * Ultra sound examination
- * Medical induction options

Labour and Birth:

- * How do I imagine active labour and birth to be (environment, positions, movement & with who?)...
- * What ideas do I have about respectful communication with me in labour & birth?
- * How do I want to enhance pleasure and work with the power of birth?
- * What expectations do I have of the midwives and doctors during labour and birth?
- * In the event of unexpected medical intervention, what do I need?
- * Massage and Movement
- * Music
- * Water – bath/tub, shower, wet cloths
- * Homeopathy / Aromatherapy
- * Meditation/spiritual practices
- * Food, fluids

- * Photography, video
- * Artificial rupture of membranes
- * Choice of active birth positions
- * Perineal support/massage/oil/heat
- * Atmosphere of room and Set up
- * Who is to discover the sex of the baby
- * Forceps or vacuum extraction
- * Monitoring Baby
- * Vaginal exams
- * Gas / opioids / epidural
- * Use of mirror
- * Partner assisting with birth
- * Episiotomy

Labour third stage

- * How do I want to meet my baby and what do I want the environment to be like?
- * What support do I want to enable bonding and attachment with my baby and recovery/healing care for me?
- * In the event of unexpected medical intervention, what do I need?

- * Baby to breast
- * When to clamp and cut cord or
- * Natural or managed 3rd stage
- * Squatting / nipple stimulation
- * Lotus birth
- * Disposal of placenta

Baby care

- * Bonding with baby / skin on skin
- * Timing of weighing, measuring, bathing
- * Resuscitation and Intensive Care factors
- * If baby is deformed, injured or dies
- * Breastfeeding / breast crawl
- * Vaccinations: Vit K / Hep B
- * Rooming in

In case of a transfer to theatre, who do I want with me, what do I need?

- * Full explanation and informed choice
- * Atmosphere in theatre (calm/respectful)
- * Keeping mother and baby together
- * Time alone to process
- * People allowed into surgery
- * Photographs/video

Other ideas

- * Visitors
- * Post-natal support arrangement
- * Attach hospitals code of ethics

Our Birth Preferences: Place your names here

We are aiming for normal physiological birth and would like our birth teams skills and support to help achieve this.

We are aware that it is our right to determine what is best for us. If intervention becomes necessary for medical reasons, we wish to have the benefits and risks explained, as well as available alternatives, including doing nothing. Please encourage us to have some time alone to consider this information before making a decision.

We know that as a team we are working toward a safe and satisfying birth experience for both mother, baby and partner, now, and in the long term memory of this very special day. Thank you in advance for your support.

The things that are most important to us are:

- That the natural process is not disturbed unless there is a medical need and we have agreed. Please keep our environment calm and quiet with dim lights, low voices and minimal interruptions.
- To labour and birth in any position that feels right.
- To work with the intensity of the contractions and to be supported emotionally and physically if I feel challenged. Do not offer me drugs, I know what my options are.
- To work with our doula who is giving us emotional support, physical comfort and helping us to understand our options.
- Access to a bath and shower for labour and or birth. To birth in any position and support to use natural expulsive efforts. Please allow for longer time to birth if my baby and I are safe.
- Skin to skin contact immediately after birth, with minimal cleaning unless needed to stimulate the baby's breathing.
- A natural third stage if the birth has been normal, with the cord to stop pulsing before cutting. My partner to cut the cord if possible.
- My baby to have time to initiate breastfeeding without assistance.
- In case of an emergency or a caesarean please do all you can to preserve our birthing intentions.