Especially for the Birth Partner

Course Pack & Additional Resources

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Encouragement in Labor

During labor, one of the most powerful tools of the coach is the ability to ensure the mother that she is doing well and to encourage her to continue what she is already doing. You may not believe it, but many a laboring mother has been helped by three little words, “You’re doing great!” It sounds too simple to be true, but it is.

During active labor, the mother may not realize how far she has come. She is literally taking her labor one contraction at a time, and unlike those supporting her, she may not see it as one contraction closer to the birth. She may not even recognize that she has a significant portion of her labor behind her.

That is one of the reasons a coach is so important. The coach becomes the mother’s “eyes and ears,” watching what is happening and letting the mother know where she is. Comments such as “I can’t do this!” can be calmed by responses such as, “but you’ve been doing this for an hour and you’re doing great.” Suddenly, the mother will have a newfound confidence to continue.

Transition is a time of confusion for a mother. She cannot get comfortable and she doesn’t seem to know what to do. She may not even remember that she is in labor for a baby. It is at this point that the reassuring words of her coach can help a woman most.

She will need to be reminded how close she is to pushing and to holding her baby. She will also need to be reminded what to do. She may not remember for more than a few seconds, so repeat yourself without getting frustrated. Looks of panic on the mother can be responded to with, “I’m right here, we’re almost done. Let the contraction go away.”

What are the magic words of encouragement that will help the mother? That will depend on who she is, and what your relationship is to her. In some instances, “I love you” will be reassuring. In other cases, “You’re doing perfect, it’s beautiful to watch you” will reassure her. As coach, you should know the mother well enough to know what will relax and reassure her.

You may also try repeating an encouraging phrase several times. Lines such as the following, said to the mother during a contraction, can give her something to focus on, while reassuring her that what is happening is normal.

Encouraging Words to Say during Labor

I love you.
You’re doing so well.
That’s it … That’s the way.
You’re doing it!
You are so strong—strong enough for this.
You’re working with the contractions so well.
You are relaxing beautifully.
    It’s okay to cry.
That was a good one!
    I’m right here.
    I will help you.
    You can do it.
Say with me, “I can do it.”
You’re doing exactly what you need to be doing.
Each contraction is bringing our baby closer.
    We will meet our baby soon!
    I’m proud of you.
Let’s just get through this one.
    Perfect, just perfect.
The baby is moving down, the baby will be here soon.
The baby is trying to come out. You are helping her come out.
    The stronger it feels, the better it works.
    You are doing so well.
Your body is working perfectly. Everything is working perfectly.
What to Bring to the Hospital or Birth Center

**Small Bag for Labor**
- Chap stick
- Massage lotion
- Oil for the perineum
- Essential oils (Lavender is a good one)
- Something to pass the time in early labor (cards, book, etc.)
- Fluids for mom (see article “The Birth Marathon: Food & Drink for Labor & Birth”)
- Snacks for partner
- Bathing suit and change of clothes for partner
- Toothbrush and toothpaste for partner
- CDs / CD player (hospital may provide one?)
- Birth ball & pump
- Plastic container, large enough to hold compresses (e.g., water, washcloth, and ice)
- T-shirt (or clothing of your choice) to labor in (if desired)
- Warm socks
- Camera
- At least two pillows (in colored pillow cases)
- 10 copies of your Birth Plan

**Suitcase**
- Nightgowns (2–3)
- Robe and slippers
- Toothbrush and toothpaste
- Comb, brush, etc.
- Deodorant or other toiletries
- Shower cap
- Underpants
- Nursing bras
- Reading/writing materials
- Going home clothes (that fit at 5–6 months)

**For the Baby**
- Infant car seat safely installed
- Receiving blanket, outdoor blanket
- Outfit to wear home, undershirt, booties, cap
- Diapers
- Diaper wraps or plastic pants (if not using disposables)
Cheat Sheet for the Birth Partner

(Take me with you!)

Early Labor (at home)

- Encourage mom to eat to appetite
- Remind her to drink fluids.
- Help her to REST for the big event (no last-minute housecleaning!).
- Remind mom to keep her bladder empty.
- If labor starts in the middle of the night, encourage mom to go back to sleep.
- Keep mom company and distract her—walk with her, play cards, watch TV, dance, etc.
- Encourage mom to change positions frequently, favoring upright positions.
- Time contractions, from time to time, and keep a written record. (Time from onset of one contraction to the onset of the next one; that is the frequency of the cxs. Also note how long the cx lasts.) Do this for an hour or so and then put the stopwatch aside. Can check again later if it feels like things are picking up.
- Watch mom for visible signs of tension, especially in response to cxs, and help her to relax (baths, massage, deep breathing, verbal reminders).
- If mom seems anxious, ask her what she needs to feel safe.
- Ask her if there is anything she needs done around the house “to feel ready.”
- Keep your care providers and support team updated.
- Realize that if you tell friends and family that you are in labor, you are inviting their energy and possible intrusion into the experience. Would it be better to let them know after the baby is born?
- Protect her from any negative people or influences.
- Tell her how well she is doing.
- Enjoy this time together.

Active Labor

- Eliminate distractions in the environment; add to comfort with pillows, dimmed lights, music, etc.
- Control the presence of visitors, in alignment with your birth plan.
- Help navigate any decisions regarding her care, using your birth plan as a guide.
- Keep lips and mouth moist.
- Give her a back massage.
- Encourage her to drink fluids and urinate at least once per hour.
- Encourage mom to change positions frequently, favoring upright positions.
- Remember the 3 R’s—Rhythm, Relaxation, Ritual.
• Recognize when she is coping well (rhythmic movement, relaxation) and protect the ritual.
• Help her find a ritual that works if she is struggling.
• Suggest immersion in water (if she is able) or a shower.
• Tell her you are proud of her.
• Praise her strength.

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**Transition**

• Remind her to take one cx at a time.
• Breathe with her.
• Help her to rest and relax between cxs (big breath out).
• If she panics, move in close, establish eye contact, and help her stay focused for every cx.
• Change the ritual if the one she was using isn’t working any more.
• Expect it to get a little hairy; this just means that she is progressing (remind her of this!).
• Remember that this is usually the shortest part of labor.
• Don’t give up on her if she gives up on herself.
• Hold intent for her if she has lost it temporarily.
• Validate her feelings.
• Tell her that you love her.

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<th>Face-to-Face, Breathe, Stay Calm, Hold Intent, Validate, Reassure</th>
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**2nd Stage/Pushing**

• Help her find the most comfortable and productive position
• Whisper words of encouragement. “You’re doing just fine.” “Just like that.”
• Encourage her to rest between cxs.
• Remind care providers about any key items in the birth plan related to 2nd stage and immediate postpartum care for the baby (e.g., hot compresses to perineum, skin-to-skin, delayed cord clamping, etc.).
• Enjoy your baby!

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3rd Stage/Delivery of Placenta

- Stay focused on the mom and the birth (it’s not over yet; phone calls can wait).
- If she is reluctant, remind her that there are no bones in the placenta (“Almost done.”).
- Give her a drink of something sweet.
- If she is shaky, ask the nurse to get her warm blankets.
- Encourage skin-to-skin contact with the baby.
- Continue to advocate for birth plan, as needed.
- Enjoy your baby!

*Focus, Drinks, Warmth, Protect, Celebrate*

Immediate Postpartum Recovery (First Two Hours)

- Keep mom and baby together, skin-to-skin.
- Baby will likely want to latch at the breast if given access. Ask for privacy if you like.
- Now you can make your calls! (Make an assessment whether or not you want visitors right away.)
- Take pictures.
- Have a meal.
- Celebrate!
- REST.

*Skin-to-Skin, Breastfeeding, Privacy, Eat, Pictures, Celebrate, Rest*

If Things Don’t Go as Planned

- Help with informed decision making. Remember the questions:
  1. How will this help mom or baby?
  2. Can you describe the procedure involved?
  3. What are the risks or unintended consequences?
  4. Urgency? What are the consequences of giving it more time?
  5. Choices? Is there anything else that can be tried instead?
- Continue to advocate for pieces of the Birth Plan that can still be accomplished (e.g., skin-to-skin immediately after a cesarean delivery is possible).
- Try to minimize the down side of any medical interventions (e.g., she does not need to lie flat on her back in bed just because she has fetal monitors strapped on or even an epidural in place).
- Understand that you are doing your best and that birth is unpredictable. Hang in there.

*Informed Consent, Advocacy, Adaptation, Stay with It*
Additional Suggestions for Partners

- Wear comfortable clothing and shoes. You could be on your feet for a long time.
- Bring a bathing suit or pair of shorts that you can wear in the shower (or birth tub, if that is part of your plan).
- Bring a change of clothes.
- Pack food and drink for yourself.
- Keep your breath fresh by bringing a toothbrush and toothpaste.
- Bring your birth plan and have a good understanding of mom’s wishes and desires for the birth.
- Recruit additional help for the labor room if you are feeling like you could use some support. A mother, sister, aunt, close friend, or doula could be that person for you.

**BRING: Comfortable Clothing, Food & Drink, Breath Freshener, Birth Plan, More Help(?)**
Additional Resources

Books