



Amanda Harry^{MSW, RSW}
Psychotherapy and Consulting

amandaharry.com

The Keeper of the Cave

HOW A BIRTH PARTNER CAN SUPPORT A CALM, CONFIDENT BIRTH

We can imagine that historically, when we lived in caves... mom would be inside, in the warm, dark, cosy space having her baby, whilst partner would be standing outside of the cave with a spear, protecting mom and baby from predators. Although the space has changed, the role of birth partner is just as important as ever. During labour, we hope there will be no predators, but we know that there is a big risk of interruptions. The Birth Partner's key role is to protect mother and baby's space and make sure that no one disturbs their private bubble of positivity and calm.

In order to do this, birth partners can:

ENSURE THAT THE ENVIRONMENT IS 'EQUIPPED'

Making the birth environment as conducive to birth as possible is hugely important and can often be the key to a good birth.

Environment: We're making a safe, secure "nest" for mom to birth in, just as every other mammal instinctively does. A cat or dog or horse or elephant will not give birth until it feels that it is in a safe, protected place. Humans are no different. A small, cosy, quiet, familiar room will support a sense of safety and security.

Quiet: Turn on soft relaxing music. Ask that everyone keep their voices low, and talking to a minimum. If you speak in a soft voice, anyone else in the room will tend to use a soft voice as well. Any monitors, phones or distracting sounds should be turned down or off.

Intimate: We are bringing the intimacy of the baby's conception



into his or her birth experience. This is not a party or a spectator sport. Moms should feel safe and uninhibited.

Prepared & Private: Give a copy of your birth plan to your care providers, nurses, doula, and any other support people, to make sure everyone who attends your birthing understands and respects your desires. Hang a sign on the door, as a reminder that this is a different type of birth than the standard medically managed scenario. Take a tour of the hospital/birthing unit if you plan to give birth there, if birthing at home-get towels, sheets, heaters ready-ensure that you are confident re: how to fill up pool if planning a water birth/using pool.

The effect of being observed is that we tense up which could result in labour slowing down. Limit the number of people in the birthing room to those with whom you are very close and comfortable. If you need privacy, politely ask for it.

Patient: Baby will come when baby is ready! Cover up the clock. Decline continuous fetal monitoring unless you are concerned about baby's safety, and offers to "speed things up". Give mom's body all the time and space it needs to get the job done right. As long as baby is okay and mom is okay, you can labour all day long. Just stay rested, hydrated, and nourished, and allow things to progress on their own.

Encouraging: There should be no negative or discouraging language or stories used in mom's presence. Refrain from mentioning or asking about mom's "pain level." Focus on how to make mom as comfortable as possible. If she needs something, she will ask for it.

Dark (or dim): Mom will feel safer and less inhibited if the lights are low. It will help her tune out distractions and go deeper into relaxation.

USE THEIR BRAIN

When important decisions need to be made, the birthing partner will get all of the necessary information and relay it to the mother between surges.

Birth partners are prepared to get information on:

- B** What are the **BENEFITS** of this course of action?
- R** What are the **RISKS**?
- A** Are there any **ALTERNATIVES**?
- I** What are the **IMPLICATIONS** of following this course of action? Will it make further **INTERVENTIONS** more likely?
- N** What if we do **NOTHING** and wait for an hour or two before doing anything?

ACT AS AN ADVOCATE

Ensure that wishes about the birth and after the birth are respected. This includes keeping an eye on whatever the mother has decided about:

- Induction
- Support to increase comfort
- Cord clamping
- Injection of synthetic oxytocin to mother
- Vitamin k for baby
- Immediate skin to skin contact



Use your Tools

To help mother maintain focus, calm and confidence; learn relaxation, mindfulness and hypnobirthing tools to use throughout labour.

Provide Continuity of Care

Without exception, research agrees that continuous support from a known caregiver gives the best outcomes for childbirth but sadly this seldom happens in birthing centres and hospitals. Just knowing that the person you know and love is there for you is of enormous benefit whilst giving birth.

Be Present

Be mindfully present in the moment so that you are attuned to mother's needs and able to respond as well as prepared to welcome the baby into this world once he or she arrives. In practice this may mean turning off your phone and leaving the photography to someone else.

Trust

Mother's instincts about birth and baby are currently highly attuned. She can be trusted absolutely to know what is best and what to do.



SPECIFIC SUPPORT DURING THE STAGES

The Early (UP) Stage of Labour

- Support mother to rest, stay hydrated, snack when hungry and stay home as long as possible
- Time surges once they become frequent
- Call hospital/midwife when 3 or 4 minutes apart and 1 minute long

Transferring to Hospital or Birth Center

- If you transfer from home to hospital or birth centre—be mindful that labour can slow down or even reverse—so wait until she is in well-established labour.
- Maintain her EQUIPPED environment as much as possible during transfer.
- Support her to stay inside as long as possible while you heat up and pack up the car or wait for taxi to arrive.
- Ensure she has headphones with her relaxation playing and/or earplugs to block out external noise as well as dark shades, eyes closed or lowered during the journey.
- Support her focus by keeping conversation minimal (if any is necessary)
- Keep her warm and cosy
- Encourage up breathing, visualisations and practice touch whilst waiting to be triaged
- Make environment as homey as possible once you arrive (pillows from home, familiar scents (i.e. partners t-shirt, photo, sounds).

The Second, Very Active (DOWN) Stage of Labour

- Birth Partner's role becomes most important—many midwives will instruct in pushing and will interfere with her space. Gently remind professionals of the mother's wishes and encourage a calm, quiet environment.
- Offer prompts to use tools—breath, visualizations, anchoring words, touch, counter pressure, sounding, body scan, present moment awareness, UFO (upright, forward, open) movement...relaxing in between.
- Ensure relaxations are playing when she would like them/offer them to her in case it has slipped her mind.

- Remember at times, she may prefer silence
- Important that she does not become dehydrated, offer her some sips of water on a regular basis
- Giving birth is an intense physical activity—make sure that she has healthy snacks to keep her energy up
- Offer her any of the supports that she has in her birth plan—i.e. Arnica to dissolve under tongue, essential oils to promote calm

The Golden Hour (The Hour Immediately After Birth):

The mother's whole being will be focused on her baby, so it's up to the birth partner to keep an eye on whatever you have decided about:

- Cord Clamping
- Injection of synthetic oxytocin for mother
- Vitamin K for baby
- Immediate skin to skin contact

Continue to ensure that the environment is EQUIPPED and that you are fully present (i.e. ask someone else to take pictures so that you are not distracted).

Immediately after birth, you may find that the child is in a place of quiet alertness in which he/she will be very receptive. Speak to him, sing to her, welcome him into your family. This is the beginning of a lifelong relationship. Savour it from the very beginning!!!

If you are in hospital, you will quickly find that they can be busy and very noisy, with numerous professionals popping in to check on mother and baby and potentially family or friends wanting to visit.

A lot of coming and going is not conducive to rest or sleep for mother or baby; neither is it conducive to learning to breastfeed or to mom's recovery in general. Taking on information when you're exhausted isn't easy and during the postpartum period mother's body and mind are in tremendous flux. Partner may want to consider requesting professionals to visit once mother has had some rest and putting out a "please do not disturb" sign.

Rest & Recover



THE FOURTH TRIMESTER

The first week:

- Really limit number of visitors if at all: 20 minutes of visiting time tends to be enough for mother and baby.
- Organise for those who do visit to help—dishes, laundry, tidy, make tea, bring food.
- Act as main carer for mother so she can focus on baby. Offer snacks and drinks while she is feeding baby.

6+ weeks:

- Support Mother to focus on recovery
- Make arrangements for appropriate support for mother during the day if going back to work
- Spend as much time as possible being present with mother and baby.

For birth preparation, birth story processing and support as you transition into parenthood visit amandaharry.com to book your free 15 minute consultation.

Covered by many extended health benefit plans!



Amanda Harry MSW, RSW
Psychotherapy and Consulting
Nurturing resilience with compassion

Direct 289.439.7625
Email info@amandaharry.com
Web amandaharry.com