

LABOR COPING TECHNIQUES

Practice, practice, practice. You want these to be second nature for you, so that they are not foreign in labor. Remember, what works for you now may not work for you in labor, so practice each of these suggestions and be prepared to try them if you need them. Pam England suggests practicing for 5 minutes every day. Pick a cue for practice: driving, doing dishes, cooking.

Roving Body Check

- Concentrate on relaxing one body part at a time.
- Support can help by touching the body part and guiding the woman to the next body part.

Breath Awareness

- Fully concentrate on breathing.
- Notice when exhalation begins and ends.
- Is this outward breath long or shallow?
- Is it soft or tight?
- What is the sound of this breath?
- What is the feeling in my belly when I breathe out?

Add imagery to breath awareness

- Imagine a flower opening.
- With strong breath out, imagine pelvic bones spreading for baby.
- Watch waves rise and fall with your breath.
- Go to your "safe place" from visualizations.

Non-focused awareness (NFA)

- Focus on immediate situation in its wholeness, rather than on just one part .
- Open eyes, not looking for anything, just noticing.
 - Or try with your eyes closed.
- Don't think or judge, just notice.
- Don't react, just notice.
- You can think silently or voice out loud.
- When the contraction begins:
 - Put your full attention on outward breath.
 - Notice what you are seeing.
 - Notice what you are hearing.
 - Notice what is touching you.
 - Notice what you are touching.
 - Notice your emotions.
 - Notice what you are smelling.

Quaker listening (NFA variation)

- Mom, focus only on hearing
- Support person: Speak slowly, allow her to listen for a full breath or two, before offering a new suggestion:
 - "Notice the sounds in this room."
 - "Notice the sounds in the next room."
 - "Notice the sounds in the hallway."
- If there is a distracting sound, include it:
 - "Notice the sounds in the room and down the hall."
- Make general suggestions:
 - "Notice the sounds from down the hall."
- Not specific:
 - "Hear the beeper."

Edges

- Rather than trying to distract yourself from pain, be utterly curious about it, explore it.
- As you breath out, notice this moment's pain.
- Where does it begin and end?
- How does its location and intensity change?
- Find the edge of comfort.
- Where is your body soft and relaxed?
- Look at the edge under a microscope
 - Notice its color, texture.
 - Is it smooth? Does it have cracks, crevices?

Centering

- Focus on the center of the sensation.
- Notice that the center and sensation move.
- Like the eye of a hurricane, peaceful in center.
- Sometimes movement is in sync with your breath.
 - Shrink the center with your breath.

Spiraling

- Focus into the center of the sensation.
- As you breathe out, imagine sending (blowing) a spiral from the center (of the sensation) outward.
- The slower you breath out (pushing the spiral with your breath), the further you spiral away from the sensation.

Touch

- Practice massaging lower back, inner thighs, palm.
- Mom, exhale audibly for practice for partner (you'll do this naturally in labor).
- Mom, be aware of your breathing and partner's touch and of the ice (if you are using it to practice).
- Support, pay attention to her breathing pattern.
- Downward stroke with her exhale.
- On inhale, return to starting position.
- Let stroke match intensity of breathing.
- As she exhales forcefully, stroke more firmly (as the contraction increases in intensity).
- As she exhales more gently, lighten the stroke (as the contraction peaks and begins to loose intensity).
- If necessary, slow your stroke speed to help her slow her breathing.
- To help her to remember to relax, place your hand over her heart.
- Effleurage
- Support, remember downward, calm strokes. Always rub the way the hair grows.

Compiled and adapted from
Birthing From Within (England & Horowitz)
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3/2002