

PREPARING YOUR BIRTH TEAM

So many people who love you will want to help and/or be present during your labor and birth. Making plans and setting boundaries AHEAD of time will save hurt feelings and help to ensure that you get what you need on your birthing day.

Remember:

- ★ This is YOUR birth, not your parent's or friend's or sister's or doula's or doctor's or midwife's.
- ★ Everyone who attends your labor and birth should be invited as you see fit. No one is entitled to be there without your invitation. Anyone who is invited should be prepared to leave should you want them to do so.
- ★ Privacy and feeling safe are critical for birthing women. You absolutely have the right and obligation to make sure that your space and privacy will be protected and respected.
- ★ Birth is not a spectator sport. Everyone invited to attend your labor should have a function.

Plan ahead:

- Make a list of expectations for your doula, midwife and one another. Expectation lists may overlap, but will help to make sure you get all the support you are wishing for, give your team concrete instructions and help validate for you that you've made wonderful, comprehensive plans.
- Consider composing a letter to members of your birth team to help you set boundaries.
- Include who will be present at labor, who will be nearby in a supporting role and what you expect of each person.
- Send the letter to everyone on your birth team so that no one feels singled out. This is an excellent way to set boundaries with people you may want nearby, but not actually present at your birth.

Take advantage of offers of help you receive. Here are some helpful jobs for helpful friends and family members who will not actually be present at your labor:

- ★ Schmooze the staff duty - Have someone bring purchased goodies to thank the staff for caring for you. Do you need one item for labor and delivery nurses and another for postpartum staff? Remember that items must be purchased and not homemade.
- ★ Information Central - This is primarily a hospital role, but can be adapted for family who live nearby a homebirth. Is there someone who wishes to be close to you, but will not be in the room for your labor and birth? Ask them to be responsible for keeping others informed about what's happening with you. Give them a list of phone numbers and e-mail addresses of people who will need to be kept informed. Your doula or husband can run out (or call) with critical updates and Information Central can pass the word along. This person can also be responsible for handling your cell phones, fielding any calls that might come in when you are too busy to answer yourself and for running any errands that just must be done now. Fresh squeezed pomegranate juice anyone? Seriously, I once had a dad leave a birth in search of Kosher grape juice which the hospital did not carry and I've made more than one run to the hospital gift shop (only to find it closed) in search of batteries or disposable cameras. You never know what kind of things might come up.
- ★ Hold down the fort duty - This is primarily a homebirth or early labor hospital birth role. It is a wonderful thing to have someone in the kitchen keeping the smoothies coming for you (make sure they know your favorite smoothie recipe) and preparing meals for your birth team. This way, no one has to leave you for too long to prepare meals for you or themselves. This person can also field phone calls, gently steer concerned and excited neighbors away from your door, make sure the dog gets fed, keep the dishes done (you'd be surprised how many can pile up during labor) and run any errands that require running.
- ★ Sibling care at home- At a homebirth, there should be someone who can be completely available to care for your older children, someone who is not wedded to attending the actual birth, but who is prepared to do so should your older children decide to be present. Do you have more than one child? Should each of them have a support person?
- ★ Sibling care for hospital births - Who's going to keep the children? Will they bring the new brothers and sisters up for a visit with the new baby? Remember that older siblings often feel left out with all the attention a new baby receives. Prepare their caregivers to make an extra effort to make sure older children feel especially loved and honored.
- ★ Photographer - Want baby-coming-out-pictures? What about just brand new baby pictures? Sometimes a doula or a dad can grab a camera and make that happen, but sometimes doula and dad are holding you or your legs or your hand and taking pictures just isn't possible. If photos are important to you, consider hiring or designating someone.