



Excerpt from the book Positive Birth in New Zealand



5 ways to be the best birth support person

Here's a couple of suggestions to help you be the best support person for your partner during birth.

1. **Be Calm and Relaxed**

Ok, so you're a first time Dad (I know not all support people are fathers but a lot of them are). You've never been at a birth before. In fact, you'd almost prefer you'd not have to go to a birth ever. You just want to be there to support your partner and meet your baby. And you don't want to feel completely useless. So, the single most important thing for you to do is be calm and relaxed. Why? Beyond the obvious, your partner is going to pick up on your energy and suggestions. A woman in labour is very very suggestible. Which is why you need to radiate calmness. If you start to get nervous and worried and you express it, she will pick up on this straight away and start to get nervous too. So, as a birth companion this is where some relaxation techniques are very helpful for YOU to make sure you can tap into the tools you've learned and be that rock you intended to be. You also need to be mindful of anyone else in the room. How are they reacting and responding? Are they assisting the level of relaxation and calmness in the room, or are they providing a different energy of fear? If so, is it necessary for them to be there right now? Sometimes, if a relative or other person is asking to be at the birth and you know they may not convey the right

energy, it might be well worth considering having them not attend until just as baby is being born.

2. Be there – be present

Birth can be quick experience for some, and for others it can take many many hours. More often than not it takes a little time to establish and get moving. Sometimes this might start during the day, sometimes at night. Sometimes there might be other things going on in life – often work. Sometimes it's just the dog that needs a walk. Regardless of what else is happening, the single most important thing is for you to be fully there for your partner. No work, no multitasking on devices. No other distractions. In labour you effectively need to be a mind reader, but, sadly none of us are telepathic. What does she need? If you've done the hypnobirthing course you will likely have a few non verbal signals to pick up on – signals to help her when she needs to go deeper within. Signals so you know when surges are starting and finishing, if she needs to eat or drink. All it requires is that you are present, you are there to support and help her if and when she needs it.

3. Saying the right thing

Gosh this is hard isn't it. How do you know what you should say? And shouldn't it come naturally to you on the day? No, not necessarily. If you are a male birth support person (ie the pregnant mothers significant other) then you quite possibly haven't been in too many birth scenarios before. What do you do, and heck, what do you say to comfort her? This is where doing the HypnoBirthing course can be very useful as you'll actually get a list of possible prompts, affirmations and phrases. From here your partner can decide what her preferred sayings are, and, because you're not a mind reader, it'll all be in black and white for you.

What you say, just like your energy and how you are feeling, can have a huge impact on a birthing mother. When you're on the same page with her in terms of what she finds inspiring and helpful you'll be a huge support to her. Yes, the phrases like "you're doing great, you're nearly there, not long to go now, you're amazing" are helpful. Yes they are reassuring. Whatever you say make sure it's worded positively – eg "relax those hands, relax your face, that's great" instead of "don't tense up your face and hands". Having a variety of phrases on hand, pre-written to say will help keep her inspired as to how she really wants to feel and be, rather than repeating the same old "you're doing great" for 7 hours straight.

4. Knowing where to go

This might sound ridiculous – of course you know where to go – to the hospital/birth centre of course! (That's if you're not staying at home). But hey – have you done a drive by together to this venue prior to going into labour? If not – please do. Some venues are easier to access than others. Auckland Hospital on a busy day can be mayhem. Where do you park? Where do you drop off? Can you leave your car out front for a while? You need the answers to all these BEFORE your partner goes into labour. Not during! I once heard from a poor mother whose partner got all confused about where to park the car, and they ended up getting lost and parking at the other side of the hospital grounds (a large hospital) and it took them an hour of walking to find the birth suite! She was not a happy mama.

So, always a good idea to have had a conversation together about what is the quickest route to get to the birth place taking traffic and time of day into consideration. And if your partner is 100% confident in your ability to get her to her birthing venue in the quickest, most comfortable way she will be able to sit back and relax on the journey (ideally focussing on breathing and complete relaxation to maximise the effectiveness of each labour surge).

5. Asking questions and being curious

This is last on the list, but definitely not the Least!

I know you're not a birth professional, but this is YOUR baby. You need to know what is going on, what's being offered, what decisions you might need to make. Remember – these are all YOUR decisions. This is YOUR baby. And, as I love to quote a midwife who attended my classes recently "You can say NO to everything". To know whether to say yes, or no when faced with situations like the possibility of induction or intervention (non-emergency) it is imperative to ask the necessary questions to evaluate your options. What are the benefits? The risks? The alternatives? Can you get a second opinion on this? These are all valid questions to enable you to come to your own conclusion about what the best next step is for you. And remember, if your partner is in labour, she doesn't need her mind to be analysing or thinking about what to ask, she needs to be focussing on resting, relaxing, breathing and her other techniques. She needs YOU to speak up, to ask, and to be curious. Then you can both make the necessary decisions together. If you don't ask questions what often can happen is that after the birth is over, weeks, months or even years down the track you might look back at the set of events that occurred and wonder what could have happened if you'd just enquired or asked or been curious about your options rather than follow instructions or someone else's ideas.

Wishing you all the best in your birth and your ability to be the BEST support person ever for your partner. I know you can do it!

There is so much more tips, tools, information, inspiration and skills available in the Positive Birth in NZ book.

You can find it at www.positivebirths.co.nz

Or email Helen directly at: helen@positivebirths.co.nz