

Creating a Birth Plan

Women love talking about their labour and birth experience...and their babies. This can be both helpful and harmful. Many pregnant women become panicked after hearing all the gory details of other women's experiences. The truth is most people focus on the negative because it makes for better storytelling. There are many positive and empowering birth stories. So what's a pregnant mom to do? How do you siphon through all the stories and 'advice', and how can women 'plan' for their own birth experience?

The truth is the word 'plan' should not even be in the term that describes a document outlining women's choices for labour and birth. A birth plan is a document that was intended to encourage women to think about birth practices, communicate with the health care provider, and ultimately make informed decisions. Planning is within the context of each woman's "reality" – her lifestyle, her personal preferences, her health care provider, and place of birth. Rather than a checklist of "options" or "choices", expectant parents should plan for a safe, satisfying experience. The framework for the birth plan should be based on confidence, freedom, and support. "How can I become and remain confident in my own abilities", "How can I have the freedom I need to find comfort during labour and birth, and to mother my baby?" Who will provide the physical and emotional support that I will need?"

Creating a birth plan encourages pregnant women and their support person(s) to sit down and process the above questions. It provides an opportunity to research information and to openly communicate fears, concerns and expectations for labour and birth. It also acts as an effective communication tool with the caregiver.

This is the same reason childbirth preparation classes are useful. People sometimes say "women have been having babies for thousands of years; they don't need someone to teach them how to do it". The purpose of most childbirth classes isn't to 'teach' women how to birth, it's to increase the confidence of both the women and their support that birth is a normal, natural process. Furthermore, it informs expectant parents about current research on various topics so they can make their own decisions.

Expectant parents need to take their health and pregnancy into their own hands and become a part of each decision making process that will impact them. It is never too early or too late to become an active participant in your prenatal care and labour and birth experience.

This article was written by Lamaze Certified Childbirth Educators of *Discover Birth Lamaze*. Through childbirth classes and free early pregnancy workshops, *Discover Birth Lamaze*, educates expectant parents throughout the Durham region about labour and birth.