

BIRTHING BODY, BREATH, HEART & MIND: A CONTEMPLATIVE BIRTHING WORKSHOP

Why the name?

Contemplative Practices are found in most world cultures, in secular and religious settings alike. While different in their actual practices, all Contemplative traditions share a focus on awakening perception, and the belief that this deepened awareness inherently cultivates insight and an inspired and compassionate connection to oneself and others.

Contemplative Birthing Workshops focus on exercises that awaken a deeply visceral experience of the physical body, and exercises that work to build strong connection between birth partners. The ability to feel and follow the lead of the physical body in labor is perhaps the most important tool one can bring to labor. Additional class exercises work to develop a deepened awareness of one's thought processes and emotional experiences. As students begin to notice these ever-present aspects of their "selves," (body, heart and mind) they discover that they can be informed, rather than controlled, by them. As students observe the many parts of their person with a light touch, they discover a freedom to react to the intensity of labor in an insightful and deeply responsive manner—ultimately becoming the midwives of their own births and entry into parenthood.

Contemplative Birthing Workshops work to bring together this increased internal awareness with a cognitive understanding of the physiology of childbirth, current US birthing practices, and the choices available to families during the birthing and postpartum period. Together these open the door to an empowered, gentle and fulfilling birth.

ABBREVIATED SYLLABUS

Please note that each class meeting incorporates multiple experiential exercises focused on connecting women more deeply to the power of their bodies, connecting women and birth partners to their mental, emotional and physical experiences, and toward building a deep working-connection between women and their partners in support of an empowered labor. The abbreviated syllabus does not list experiential exercises.

CLASS 1

Birth

The Labor Process

Labor and Newborn Care Choices

CLASS 2

Empowered Choices

Complications & Interventions

Cesarean Sections

Informed Consent/Refusal

Creating a Birth Plan

CLASS 3

Holding the Mother

Laboring Positions

Breath Practices

Pushing Techniques and Physical Awareness

CLASS 4

Holding the Mother, Supporting the Birth Partner

Partner Labor Massage
Manual Labor Support
Verbal & Emotional Support
Support Tools

CLASS 5

Sacred Space

Setting the Laboring and Postpartum Space for the Family
What to Expect in Local Hospitals
Reviewing our Birth Plans

CLASS 6

Facing our Powerlessness, Finding our Power

Looking at our birth plans; letting go of our birth plans
Postpartum Family, Mother and Infant Care
Unfolding into parenthood

DETAILED SYLLABUS

Please note that not all exercises are outlined here.

CLASS 1 - Birth

A. Meeting/Discussing our Thoughts about Birth

B. The Labor Process

1. Prelabor
2. First Stage
 - a. Early Labor
 - b. Active Labor
 - c. Transition
3. Second Stage
 - a. Resting Stage
 - b. Descent Stage
 - c. Crowning
 - d. Birth
4. Third Stage
 - a. Delivery of Placenta
5. handouts:
 - a. early labor chart
 - b. signs of pre-labor/early labor/stages of labor
 - c. choices in labor
 - d. newborn care directly following birth

C. What is sensation? What is pain? What pain is too much?

D. What is Empowerment in Birth? The Perfect Birth?

E. Experiential exercises:

1. Awareness Scan (AS)
2. Push Hands
3. Belly Breath

CLASS 2 – Empowered Choices

A. Questions from Last Week?

B. Interventions in Labor

1. Why do Interventions Matter? Safety? Experience?
2. Amnioinfusion
3. Inductions & Augmentation
 - a. Reasons to Induce/Reasons not to Induce
 - b. Natural Induction Methods (handout)
 - c. Manual and Pharmaceutical Inductions (handout)
4. Pain Medications & Hospital Paradigm
 - a. About Pain Medications (handout)
 - b. Medications preferences list (handout)
5. Episiotomies
 - a. Vaginal Power
 - i. introduction to visualization
 - ii. pushing location
 - iii. short breath
 - iv. compresses, oil, pressure, massage
 - b. Episiotomy vs Natural Tear Facts (Handout)
6. Assisted Delivery: Forceps and Vacuum Extractions
 - a. The Power of Position – Movement to Support Birth
7. Cesarean Sections (handout)
 - a. Prevalence
 - b. Necessary or Unnecessary?
 - c. Effects on Mother and Child
 - d. Prevention Tools (handout)
 - e. Gentle Cesareans
 - f. Emotionally processing a Cesarean

C. Informed Consent/Refusal (handout cue card)

D. Creating a Birth Plan

1. Elements of a Birth Plan
2. Birth Plan Checklist (handout)
3. Sample Birth Plans (handouts)

E. Experiential Exercises

4. Riding the Breath
5. Eye to Eye Grounding
6. Touch Grounding

CLASS 3 – Holding the Mother

A. Self Supported Laboring Positions (handout)

1. Pain Relief
2. Assisting Descent
3. Backlabor

4. Resting Positions
5. Supporting Pushing
6. Head Rotation

B. Partner Supported (handout)

- 1-6 Above

C. Breathing Techniques

1. Belly Breath
2. Short Breath
3. Guided Breath (“wave breath”)

D. Pushing

1. Positional Support
 - a. Anatomy, Physiology and Physics of Pushing
 - b. Self and Partner Supported Positions
2. Breath Support
3. Finding the perineum and “pushing low”

CLASS 4 – Holding the Mother, Supporting the Birth Partner

A. Massage Techniques (handout)

1. Stroking
2. Kneading
3. Compression
4. Deep Sustained Pressure
5. Percussion
6. Vibration

B. Manual Support (handout)

1. Sacral Counter-pressure
2. Hip Squeeze
3. Baby Lift
4. Pelvic Wing Opener

C. Emotional & Physical Support

1. Verbal
2. Physical
3. Focal
4. Touch
5. Quiet presence
6. Support Tools

D. Finding Your Way (exercise)

CLASS 5 – Sacred Space

A. Creating Safety in the Laboring Environment

1. Physical Space
- 2.. Birth Attendants
- 3.. Emotional Environment

B. Considering the Postpartum Period

1. Protecting Calm for the Family
2. Finding Help from Extended Family and Community

3. Exploring Expectations

C. What to Expect in Local Hospitals

1. Memorial Hospital
2. Women and Infants

D. Reviewing Our Birth Plans

CLASS 6 – Facing our Powerlessness, Finding our Power

A. Releasing You Planned Birth & Finding Yourself

B. Postpartum Care for the Mother, Infant and Family

1. Postpartum Healing
2. Newborn Appearances
3. Breastfeeding
4. Newborn Care
5. Changing Dynamics In Relationships
6. Emotional Changes
7. Postpartum Support Resources

C. Unfolding Into Parenthood