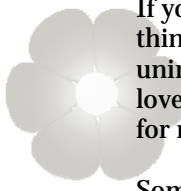




Partnering In Birth

Partners play a huge role in supporting a mother through labor. How you have chosen to labor and birth and who you have chosen for your birth team will be a large indicator of what type of support mom will require of you, her partner.



If you both have chosen to have a doula present at your birth, your doula will offer to do many of the things in this outline, which means that you will be freed up to be as involved in the 'process' or uninvolved as you and mom are comfortable with. Sometimes, the best support that a partner can be is to love on mom, giving emotional encouragement, and allow the doula to be the mental and physical support for mom.

Some moms and partners want the partner to be very involved in every aspect of the process, in which case your doula can help you by showing you how to do a lot of these things, reminding you of your education prenatally, giving suggestions, and translating the medical terminology presented by your care givers.

If you have not chosen to have a doula, this little cheat sheet can come in handy to help partners to know which coping techniques will help during different stages of labor and birth.

Early Labor

Early labor is marked by excitement, joy, nervousness, disbelief, and a little anxiety. Early labor tends to (but not always) start out with mild contractions, further apart, that don't really demand moms attention, but she notices them coming in a pattern. Some women find that their water breaks at the onset, others find that they have mild spotting or 'show'.

To help mom during this time, you can:

- Remind her to eat and drink
- Remind her not to pay attention too soon – follow your regular schedule. If it is meal time, eat. If it is time to walk the dog, do it. If it is nap time, rest. There will come a time when mom's contractions demand her attention.
- Encourage a quick energy boosting nap if labor permits
- Make sure everything is IN the car if you are planning on a hospital or birth center birth
- Make sure that you have towels or waterproof sheets on the bed and/or chairs/birthing ball that mom chooses to sit/lay on
- Make sure that the birth pool is ready if you are planning a home water birth
- Pack your cooler of snacks and drinks if you are planning a hospital or birth center birth
- Contact those who need to know that labor has started (your doula, your care provider, your babysitter or animal sitter)

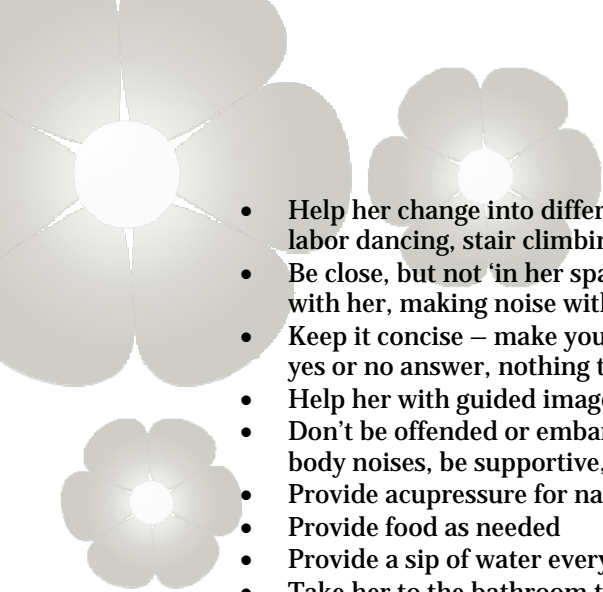
Active Labor & Transition

When mom's labor demands that she pays attention, things may be picking up as well. Contractions will probably be coming closer together, lasting longer, and feeling more intense. A good rule of thumb to know if mom is moving from early labor to active labor is to use the camera test: try taking a photo of mom *during* a contraction. If mom is able to smile and look at the camera, she is still, most likely, early labor. If she is not smiling, looks 'ticked off' or simply ignores the camera, she is, most likely, in active labor.

A key to this time is that, whatever works for mom, you do. If you have been doing one thing for awhile and that technique is seeming to be less effective or feels monotonous, suggest something new. Your job is emotional assurance and support.

To help mom during this time, you can:

- Match her mood – if she feels serious, you are serious. If she makes a joke, you laugh as is appropriate. If she is contracting, don't ask her questions or try to distract her with a story, be momcentric.

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- Help her change into different active positions: standing, walking, squatting, hands and knees, labor dancing, stair climbing, etc..
 - Be close, but not 'in her space'. This includes eye contact, brushing hair off her brow, breathing with her, making noise with her, etc..
 - Keep it concise – make your instructions short and sweet. Try to phrase questions as to require a yes or no answer, nothing that requires too much thought.
 - Help her with guided imagery or visualizations that you might have practiced prenatally
 - Don't be offended or embarrassed – if she snaps at you, let it roll off your shoulders. If she makes body noises, be supportive, she doesn't need to feel that she has to be proper in her laboring.
 - Provide acupressure for nausea or pain
 - Provide food as needed
 - Provide a sip of water every few minutes
 - Take her to the bathroom to urinate every hour
 - Give her warm compresses on her lower back and cold washcloths on her forehead
 - Keep a wastebasket handy if she is feeling nauseous
 - Prepare her toothbrush if she does vomit
 - Keep an ear out for high-pitched noises that are counterproductive to labor. If you hear them, make positive noises and tell her to copy you
 - Massage her back, lower back, thighs, neck, or belly
 - Help her on and off the birthing ball
 - Draw her a bath or encourage her to use the shower
 - Keep the lights low, noise quiet, and the mood soft
 - If she seems frazzled or upset, ask for some time alone, together. Then kiss and love on her – reconnect
 - Help her to understand, between contractions, what people are saying or suggesting
 - Ask the medical staff to wait until contractions are over to suggest things, move her, or provide an assessment (BP, fetal monitor, vaginal exam)
 - Protect her space – if a visitor shows up, ask mom if she wants that person to come in. If not, respect that choice.
 - Give her positive affirmations of her progress, your feelings for her, your baby and her body
 - Remember to keep yourself fed and hydrated – this is hard work for partners too
 - If she receives medication/an epidural
 - help her change positions from side to side
 - remind the nursing staff to help her urinate every 2 hours
 - Let her rest if she wants to and rest when she does
 - Provide her with hydration when needed
 - Leave the TV and phone off – stay involved and focused on your babies birthing time
 - Provide warm blankets if she starts shivering. She isn't cold, it is the hormones of labor, but warm blankets can be comforting
 - Keep her as upright as possible

Pushing

Pushing occurs after active labor and transition has passed. This time is marked by baby coming down the birth canal and giving mom an urge to press baby down and out.

To help mom during this time, you can:

- Suggest positions, including as many upright positions as mom is comfortable with
- Request a mirror, if she wants it, to see her progress. You can also suggest she reach down and feel baby's head
- Give verbal/emotional encouragement
- DON'T count, but praise her after every push
- Provide a cool washcloth for her forehead and keep her hair out of her face
- Give her ice and/or sips of water between contractions
- Remind her birth team of her wishes