

BIRTH PLAN VS. ADVOCACY PLAN

Helping you to focus on the big picture

Story by **REBECCA SERROUL**

Many of us have heard of birth plans (and maybe even wrote them for past births). Authors like Penny Simkin and Sheila Kitzinger have written chapters and even books on writing these wishes, as well as countless websites that encourage, or even help you with writing them.

There are many reasons why you might want to think of writing a birth plan, such as it encourages parents to talk with their care provider about what they would like for their birth and it gives a guideline to partners and support people on how to support mama in labour.

However, I have also heard where birth plans have been frustrating to families, feeling like they were set up to fail rather than to succeed. And where the family had lots of wishes, but those wishes were lost within pages and pages of information.

Lately, through the births that I have been attending, as well as listening to the many birthing stories of clients and friends, I often hear that their birth plan was just a plan. It didn't help in the case of advocating for change or options within labour.

This got me thinking: Why not write an advocacy plan? A second step that helps families to think about their options — instead of looking at the details, look at the larger picture. An advocacy plan should be short (maybe five statements or mini paragraphs), and focused only on positive language. It should be bigger ideas that are important to the family. It should be easy to remember, all positive (words and imagery) and will be a great place to start when talking with your care provider, doula or partner about your wishes for labour.

Common questions in a birth plan do not always pertain to current practices at the local hospital or home births. Instead of answering “no” to many questions such as “would you like an enema in labour?” we can focus on the positive nature of birth. This helps mothers, fathers and anyone supporting at a birth feel empowered. The expectant family could use a statement like “I would like the least interventions possible at my birth” and that would include enemas, IVs, epidurals, synthetic oxytocin, etc., but not be closed-minded to these interventions if there is a want or need for them during the birth.

TAKE AWAY

Instead of looking at the details, look at the larger picture.

It also becomes a way to begin to talk about what is important in labour and the first moments of this baby's life and how the non-birthing partner might need or want to help. For example, if the birthing parent wants the least amount of interventions possible, then it would be important to have some great natural coping strategies to help in labour such as using a TENS unit, Rebozo, breathing techniques, etc.

When you take the time to write an advocacy plan, take a few moments to imagine and visualize what it would like in birth, who would be there, what would take place during labour and birth (positions, labouring in a bath or shower, etc), and what would be important in the first hours after birth. Try to look at the larger picture rather than details. Then start to write some of this down. What are some of the themes that are occurring?

Here is an example of an advocacy plan:

• **I WOULD LIKE** the least amount of interventions possible. Please remind me to use the toilet, keep well hydrated and to relax and stay calm between contractions.

• **I WOULD LIKE** to labour at home, and make the decision in labour if I would like to deliver my baby in the hospital.

• **I WOULD LIKE** to do skin-to-skin as soon as possible and nurse my baby. If I would not be able to do this, I would like my partner to do skin-to-skin as soon as possible.

• **IT IS IMPORTANT** that I am heard in labour, no matter how small an issue might be that I am voicing, please take the time to hear my concerns.

• **I WOULD LIKE** to follow my body's cue of what will be comforting in labour. I plan on changing positions, using the birthing tub and finding my own rhythm in labour. Please help me to keep the birthing room a calm place, without added stressors from the outside world.

Happy Birthing! ♡