

THRIVE DOULAS 6 TIPS FOR CREATING THE *PERFECT* BIRTH PLAN

1. Remember that a birth plan is simply a way of becoming clear about your options and considering them before your birthing time. Birth plans are rarely an example of exactly how a birth unfolds. That's really not why they exist! The purpose of a birth plan is to learn everything you can about what CAN happen during a birth experience, and have the knowledge beforehand. That way, when your birthing time rolls around, you'll be confident that you've prepared as best as possible. And when it comes time to make decisions that aren't on your birth plan, you'll already have a basis for knowing what the risks and benefits are, and be able to make decisions more easily. In general, thinking critically while in labor is quite difficult! If you do all of the thinking work beforehand, you'll be set up for success.

2. Keep it short and sweet! If you walk into the hospital with a 4 page, detailed birth plan, your care providers won't have the time or mental energy to memorize that whole darn thing! Remember to add things in context: Don't add "delayed cord clamping" if it is already the common practice of your care provider or birthing place. If you go to Earth Mama Angel Baby's website, they have a Birth Plan template tool. It's extensive. Go through that template and decide which things are the most important to you and most important for your care provider to know about you. Add the most important things (no more than 10!) to a one page birth plan that is easy to read. Make sure that the language that you use is positive and describes what you *want*--not what you *don't want*. For example, if you're planning an unmedicated birth, instead of "No epidural", write "I'm planning a labor without pain medication. Please do not offer me pain meds."

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3. Share it with your care providers! Don't forget that your care providers are there to HELP you. Bring a few copies, and excitedly share them with your nurses and OB or midwife! If you view this birth plan simply as an efficient way to communicate your intentions and desires, it's likely that your care providers will be happy to accommodate them! Don't view this birth plan as a list of demands for the hospital to follow. Setting up a great relationship with your care providers when you arrive in labor is crucial to getting the support you need. Remember: your nurse should be your best friend! Labor and delivery nurses rock and they can be your biggest comfort and advocate. Prepare your birth plan with your doula and/or care providers during pregnancy so you learn what is realistic (for instance, a water birth at a hospital without birthing tubs is just not an option) and what is already routine or procedure in your birthing place.

4. Use your BRAIN. When you're preparing to make decisions for your birth plan, use the "BRAIN" acronym to help you make each decision for each part of your plan. When you're in labor, the unexpected often comes up! It's part of the crazy awesome process of labor and birth. If and when that happens, use your BRAIN to ask questions before making decisions. And if you've already considered all of the options and risks/benefits associated beforehand, you won't necessarily need to have such a lengthy discussion while you're trying to labor, and ideally will be able to quickly make a decision that is right for you in your new situation.

Benefits: What are the possible benefits?

Risks: What are the possible risks associated?

Alternatives: Are there any other alternatives to consider?

Intuition: What does your gut tell you?! <<This is important!!!

No/Not now: What if you decide to do nothing? If you're not feeling ready to commit to a decision, you can ask: Can we wait 30 minutes to make a decision?

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5. Even if you're not planning a cesarean, make a "Cesarean Birth Plan" anyway. We think it is important to make an emergency c-section birth plan. No one is immune to a cesarean birth, no matter how healthy or prepared. If you find yourself in a place where a cesarean becomes necessary, you can rest assured that you are much more satisfied that you had choices and considered them beforehand. During a prenatal appointment, ask your care provider what your options are if a cesarean becomes necessary. You may be surprised to hear that even in emergent situations, you often have some options! Then, put it aside and completely let go of the fear of it happening--especially knowing you are prepared.

6. Work on processing fears beforehand and accepting that birth is inherently unpredictable! It's easy to let the "fear of the unknown" creep in. Do some work during your pregnancy by journaling about your fears, desires, and dreams. Or talk about them with a trusted and supportive friend or doula. Your perspective may change! It's possible to view the uncertainty of birth as a part of life! Every pregnancy, baby, birth, and mother is completely different and every experience will be unique and special. Of course, not every outcome or experience is joyful or happy. It's okay to recognize the possibilities and let go of the fears. You deserve to enter your birth experience feeling excited, joyful, and prepared to meet your baby. That is the best way to set you up for the experience you want. Accepting that the unexpected is always possible is necessary to surrendering to the intimate and intense experience of birth. If you would like some tools for getting there, give us a call or sign up for our birthing class on our website--we can help!

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2. Keep it short and sweet! (One page, easy to read)

3. Share it with your care providers! Don't forget that your care providers are there to HELP you.

4. If the unexpected comes up, use your BRAIN:

Benefits

Risks

Alternatives

Intuition

No/Not now

5. Make an emergency cesarean birth plan and then set it aside and let it go.

6. Work on processing fears beforehand and accepting that birth is inherently unpredictable!