

Suggestions for Doulas

Helping Parents in the Immediate Postpartum Period

Attuning to Mother

Goal: Creating a stress-free, nurturing, and supportive lying-in environment

- Make sure to consistently attend to mother's physical and comfort needs.
 - Keep baby and mother together at all times, if possible, but recognize mother's changing states.
 - If mother is overwhelmed and exhausted, help her keep baby with her, but provide extra support.
 - Do not leave mother alone, unless she wishes.
 - Check in with her at regular intervals to ask what you can do to support her.
 - Observe her level of tension and mood to better sense her needs.
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- Help mother cope with unexpected circumstances during the birth, that differ from her original plan and how she imagined it would be.
 - She may feel disappointed or have unwarranted guilt feelings.
 - Listen to her concerns and acknowledge unexpected outcomes (i.e. lack of control, pain, c-section).
 - At the same time acknowledge and validate mother on her courage and praise her wonderful baby. Plant seeds of accomplishment, even if situation was not optimum,
"What a difficult time you had, what a trooper you are."

Helping Mother Interact With Her Newborn

- Recognize that a mother needs time to "take in" her new baby (i.e. becoming used to baby's responses, gender, "real" baby from the "imagined" baby).
- She may not want or be able to handle the baby right away. Support her feelings and needs. If mother is not ready to be with newborn, have support person available to tend to baby. A partner, relative, or doula can hold baby for her. Make sure mother knows baby is being constantly held and monitored.
- Always respect sense of privacy and individual timing.
- Keep interruptions by staff or family to a minimum: Avoid taking baby away for exam or to warmer. Bring warmer to mother and baby. Wait to perform procedures until later, if possible.
- Allow one to one and a half hours of uninterrupted time to be with newborn.
- Be unobtrusively present if mother needs assistance. Be available to help with toileting, eating, or handling baby. Let her feel in control and don't be too quick to take over if she struggles at first.
- Help parents learn about the baby with *the Mother's Brazelton*.
- Gently help mother notice infant's individual cues and temperament: how baby listens, quiets, etc.
- Encourage mother to respond to her baby's own pace to suck and rest.

Ways to Regulate and Calm Baby

Goal: helping the baby become centered and more ready to feed.

- Use gentle flow of hands down the baby's body.
- Lower the lights, gently flex the head forward, and coo or hum softly to the baby.
- If baby "shuts down", check if asleep. If arm won't easily lift, baby is not asleep, just unresponsive.
Mother may need to wait, be calm, and wait some more, before trying again.
- Assure mother that this will become easier with time, and there are many ways to facilitate process.
- Recognize that baby who has aversion to mouth from suctioning, needs a more careful approach.
- Support the baby's efforts to crawl and feed.

Re-creating the early experience

- When mother is ready, facilitate breast crawl with dry baby on chest.
(The breast crawl can be recreated even after c-section.)
- Lay baby on abdomen, or chest for at least an hour, in a warm room.
- Can do this a number of times during the first day.
- When needed, help put baby in quiet alert state by talking to baby, and holding upright.
- Help baby to imitate mouth opening.
Mother can activate baby's wide mouth opening and correct placement on the breast by rubbing her nipple on baby's cheek and when he roots place her breast at his mouth, or by placing his nose at the nipple and chin under areola, and as he bobs and opens mouth, allow him to take areola into mouth, then put him horizontal position.
- Later, if mother needs to release negative feelings, guide her to tell a story about what happened and then use imagery to re-do experience the way she wanted, while holding the baby. Baby is often calmed (by sensing mother's relief?).

Working with Partner

- Be sure to regularly check in with mother and her partner and make adjustments as needed.
- Listen to partner's concerns separately, if appropriate.
- Help mother and partner talk to each other when either one is having trouble.
- Remind parents of the importance of rest, practical and physical support at home, and time to recuperate, get to know baby, establish feeding and sleeping, and emotionally and physically integrate the birth experience.
Also, that bonding takes time and is a process.
- Encourage parents to limit visitors, curtail normal obligations and activities.
Allow others to do household chores during this lying-in period.
- Check with mother on which visitors are welcome at this time.
Tactfully protect her from stressful encounters by explaining to visitor that mother needs rest and quiet.
- *Help partner engage with baby:*
Encourage partner to hold baby on chest, if mother can't.
Show how to dress and change baby, communicate with baby; help to observe baby's responses and to recognize baby's needs to quiet down and help to self regulate. Teach mouth opening imitation in quiet alert state.