

Birth Dreams and Visions

by Janaki Costello, ICCE, IBCLC, C.D.



—LOVING ARMS—
CHILDBIRTH SERVICES

HOW TO WRITE A BIRTH PLAN THAT WORKS!

Before writing a birth plan it is helpful to know what a birth plan is NOT. It is not a manifesto or a medical order. It is not a set-in-stone map of how your birth will go or what your caregiver must do. Rather it is a communication tool. Since we cannot actually plan out exactly how a labor will go, it is helpful to think of it as a birth dream, vision or hope.

As your pregnancy progresses take notes on what you hear, read, observe and learn in childbirth class. Take notes, sample birth plans and discuss with your partner these aspects of the labor and birth that are most important to you as well as possible interventions and options. You will both have a chance to discuss any gray areas and make some decisions. You can take these preliminary notes to your caregivers to initiate discussion with them and to make sure you are in agreement about your treatment. Asking questions of your caregivers during pregnancy will eliminate any big surprises during labor. Don't wait until the last weeks of your pregnancy. It may be too late then to change or negotiate. Be assertive when asking questions and make sure you get full answers.

If you have special needs, fears or require specific kinds of help or care, be sure to include those into your birth vision. Clarifying for the staff any special considerations ahead of time will help them to know how best to help you and to give them an idea of sensitive areas (such as past sexual abuse or fear of needles, etc.)

Be clear about what you want by listening to your own internal voice. Know what makes you happy or excited about your impending birth, understand your beliefs, your values and identify your concerns. It is helpful to research the facility where you'll be delivering. Go on a hospital tour, talk to your childbirth educator and others who have delivered there before. Write down your hopes and dreams. In this way, you will avoid listing the obvious or antagonizing staff because it appears you are ready for battle.

A birth vision can be a list of preferences or one sentence. It can be a written paragraph describing your hopes and dreams or even a picture. The birth vision reveals the individual people you are to your care providers and enlists their aid in helping you achieve a wonderful birth and a healthy baby. It should not be more than a page long.

Personalize your written vision by starting with something personal about you, your hopes and your dreams about labor. Include a brief outline of principles relating to behavior, not attitudes. Emphasize the positive.

List everyone who will be attending your birth, including their names and roles in the birth.

You may want to include a word of thanks to the staff for helping you to realize your dream of a healthy baby.

Include any preferences, such as 'no student nurses'.

List preferences for the different stages of labor if you wish, and add a separate section for after the birth and in the case of complications.

If there is one over-riding concern, list that alone. For example many people include a statement asking the staff to not offer pain medications. If a woman or person chooses to ask for pain medication then the staff can explain what is available.

Be flexible! Some will put 'Contingency Plans' or ask to be given Explanations of Interventions' with time to consider and give their permission if problems arise.

Birth Dreams and Visions Continued...

by Janaki Costello, ICCE, IBCLC, C.D.



—LOVING ARMS—
CHILDBIRTH SERVICES

In summary, organizing your thoughts on paper helps you to work out the details and make sure others will not make decisions for you. Written birth visions can be a valuable tool in opening negotiations with caregivers, of building communication and of educating. They are a valuable way to help you and your partner prepare for your baby's birth and for possible unexpected events or situations by allowing you to envision different possibilities. A birth "plan" can strengthen your relationship with your caregivers and support team by giving you a structure within which communication and sharing occurs ahead of time. Remember that the birth vision is a guideline to your hopes, dreams, feelings and preferences, rather than a directive. It will show you have thought seriously about the event that is happening and you have caringly prepared. It is just one of many tasks you will undertake to help prepare for the birth of a healthy baby.

Janaki Costello, ICCE, IBCLC, C.D.