

10 Valuable Things Anyone Can Do To Truly Encourage Parents To Empower Themselves During Conception, Pregnancy, Childbirth and Beyond

by Laura Morgan

1. Adopt and express a belief in, and behave in a manner supporting, parent's rights and abilities to make and carry out the best decisions for themselves throughout childbearing processes. The article "26 Ways to Change Birth Globally" (<http://www.midwiferytoday.com/articles/changebirth.htm>) says that, "The more people are exposed to hearing about midwifery and gentle birth, the more it will become a "norm" for them. " The same is true of parental responsibility and self empowerment. The more people are exposed to the idea that it is normal and good to care proactively for one's own health and well being during childbearing processes, the more they will believe it.
2. Don't ever condescend to the parents you help, even mentally. You'd think this one would be pretty self evident, but many, many people judge and look down on parents even when they've never been in their shoes, can't understand where they're coming from and don't know where they've been. Just because someone is young, doesn't have much money, has poor communication skills, makes life choices you wouldn't, or bends easily under pressure, doesn't mean that there isn't a brilliant person living inside that would come out if only given respect and encouragement to follow that inner wisdom.
3. Listen to parents' communication more than you communicate to them. Research parents' experiences and opinions of childbearing , and revere them as the true experts rather than the opinions and experiences of other birth professionals. Talk directly to parents instead of about them. Develop, produce, and market such materials and resources as books, websites, articles, and videos, and direct them towards helping parents gain the crucial information they need to help themselves during childbearing processes, rather than producing more materials aimed at helping professionals assist at births.
4. Expend more personal energy on helping parents gain the information they need to help themselves than on accepting roles and responsibilities that result from or lead to parental abdication of their roles and responsibilities. This point seems to be pretty obvious on the surface too, but many birth professionals make more excuses for their clients' birth choices (like that they are just not interested in taking more responsibility, not mature enough, not "ready" emotionally, mentally or spiritually, and so on) than they do giving unwavering encouragement and refusing to facilitate unhealthy reliance on the advice and actions of birth professionals.
5. Be honest and up front about all the pleasures of witnessing and participating in the joy, excitement, wonder, and satisfaction of childbearing processes you

know of -- like the ecstasy of being the first person to touch a newborn child -- and make absolutely sure to express to every parent you help, that those facets belong rightfully and gloriously to them and their family alone, and should never be shared or given away casually.

6. Become a family and birth advocate rather than a midwifery advocate. Understand that there would be no need to promote and fight valiantly for midwifery if families knew (and were supported in the knowledge) that they are able to care for themselves during healthy childbearing processes. Midwives could return to the much less interventive role of being the older women in the community, who simply explain the way pregnancy and childbirth proceed to new mothers and reassure them that their bodies know what to do. Midwives could remain invaluable through such activities as teaching prenatal courses on childbirth, cooking and cleaning for new mothers and offering help initiating breastfeeding, instead of telling laboring women when to push, sticking their hands inside them, monitoring and testing throughout pregnancy and birth, and performing other invasive medical procedures.

7. Let parents know that they don't need special techniques and gadgets to give birth safely and happily. Make sure to communicate to every mother you help, that she has all the essential ingredients for a safe, healthy birth within herself. A womb, a baby, a vagina, and a few warm pieces of fabric make an excellent, complete birth kit. Childbirth and early mothering needn't be expensive or difficult, and shouldn't be made that way through the requirements of misguided birth attendants.

8. Don't confuse the occasional need for humane and conservative treatment of a complication with the need for medical treatment of the childbearing process or the participants themselves. Encourage and support parents to demand the respectful, gentle, and closest-to-natural-as-possible treatment of any complication they encounter simultaneous with childbearing. Remember that, for instance, just because an infant may truly need a treatment like breathing assistance, that does not make separation, isolation, poking and prodding, blinding lights, vaccination, circumcision, bottle feeding, impersonal care, or other interventions necessary, beneficial, or even harmless elements of his care.

9. Realize that the private, irreplaceable hours comprising the actual birth are not where birth professionals can have the most valuable, positive impact on their clients. Here again is a point that shouldn't have to be made, but few birth professionals are willing to "give up" being physically present during late labor and delivery even when they aren't needed, despite the interests of the attendant being harmfully elevated above the best interests of the family in such cases.

10. Truly believe and behave as though "birth is not an illness" and "birth is as safe as life gets." How many other normal, healthy, intimate bodily functions do we advocate professional supervision, direction, assistance and consultation for?