

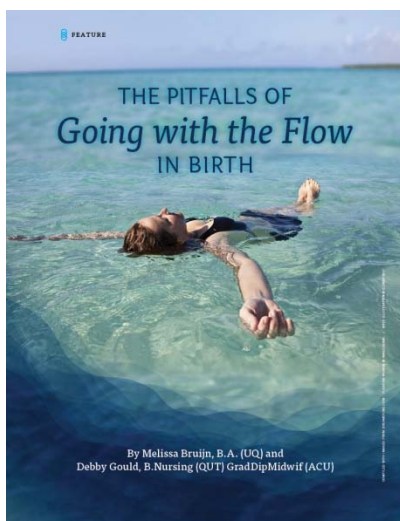
Talking Points & Resources

Please note: The page numbers in this section indicate the article location in *Pathways* magazine.

The Pitfalls of Going with the Flow in Birth

Melissa Bruijin and Debby Gould

Pathways #40, page 6



So many of us aim to “just go with the flow” as our birth plan. But could the gentle flow of birth we envisage actually be undermined with this approach? Could “going with the flow” ever be detrimental to a positive start to life for your new family? This article explores this approach and looks at how we can improve our chances of a positive birth experience...and why it matters.

Kelly is in week pregnant with her first child—mid, radiant and so alive. Her belly protrudes as she moves the chair. Knees her stomach, and lowers herself carefully onto the chair. After they join and gaze over the ocean, all eyes naturally and the question is asked. “So, says one friend, “Are you excited about birth?”

“Oh,” replies Kelly usually. “I really like a natural birth, and I don’t really want my stage, but I’m not going to go with the flow and see what happens.”

One week later, Kelly is lying in an operating table, after an induction, some painkillers, an epidural and at least of labor. The abdominal, engagement, consented for her baby, and in shock at the happenings of the last day and night. And now she is hearing her baby via abdominal surgery.

Necessary...or not?

Many people would look at the above scenario and express relief that Kelly was able to access the care she and her baby respectively needed. They would understandably assume that some danger and unexpected complication had arisen from unmonitored the intervention, and ultimately the caregiver, in her labor. And this is certainly a possibility, and it comes down to the what if this situation was merely the end result of “going with the flow?”

This possibility can be difficult to embrace. As Melissa from *BirthWork* shares: “I knew when this was suggested to me after my own cesarean, my emotions shifted from immediate denial (‘This was told it was necessary’), to disbelief (‘I do not want to hear that the pros and side effects of major surgery may have been avoided’), to intrigue (‘This means...

maybe I could have birthed naturally!’), to anger (‘I can’t believe no one told me this could happen!’), to grief (‘I am devastated for what I missed out on!’), to an understanding of an exploration of a whole side to birth that had never flowers opened.

I discovered that my own natural education was mostly lacking, even though I did the hospital’s natural course, and a private “Water Birth” course. He now told me that “just going with the flow” could possibly be setting me on a trajectory to an outcome I did not want...and very possibly did not need.

Why we decide to “go with the flow”

“Going with the flow” is an old expression among women, used to when asked about their impending birth. For some of us, it can be a promise of “to perform” and have the “perfect birth.” It suggests we are fully aware about the whole deal. What else can we say when we don’t know how things will turn out? We don’t read beyond our bodies, the use of things before. Most of us have come onto a baby being born, unless you count watching on family’s dramatic sitcoms, which most of us acknowledge aren’t very realistic birthing scenarios. What else can we say when we have been bombarded with horror movies of birth for the last few months, to friends, family and people in line at the bank? How else do we quell the nervous ache in the pit of our stomachs, except by acknowledging and accepting the responsibility of birth in this way? And when do we get the good stories, the happy stories about babies being born? We certainly don’t hear them in the news or on paper. I think you read that women who are born in a sporting arena, and follow their hearts to enter a profession, which put up the name for those of us who are already feeling pressured to perform.

Out of our control

“Going with the flow” can be a safe way of saying “I have no idea, I am scared stiff. All I have are descriptions of my experiences, and memories concerning our place they shouldn’t be on just going to get myself in the hands of the experts, and hope for the best.” Women may be inclined to view this approach as a form of denial, not however any other way, and an acknowledgment that childbirth is out of their control. An understandable justification. And understandable from, when you look at the way our culture views birth—as an event that must be endured to ensure a offspring. The wonder many of us become drawn to our work, leading to guidelines. But the art of “going with the flow” can contain inherent pitfalls unbeknownst to most women who follow the plan of action. Unfortunately, the question is not, “Are you going to go with the flow?” It is more about birthing, choice, and the question is, “Just whose flow are you going with?”

© 2013 by Melissa Bruijin and Debby Gould

Talking Points

- ❖ Starts with a personal story of Kelly, whose birth plan was to “go with the flow,” ending up on the operating table having a c-section and wondering how her “plan” led to this?
- ❖ Bruijin, with Gould, wrote this article to inform women of the ways “going with the flow” can mean giving over trust and decision-making control to your caregiver, whose interests lie in more than one camp - yours, the baby’s, but also the hospitals and their own time. But when women decide to “go with the flow,” Bruijin and Gould ask “Just whose flow are you going with?” (7)
- ❖ Women assume that the shared desirable outcome is “healthy baby, healthy mother.” But what does “healthy” mean to each party? For the hospital, it may mean that both mother and baby are alive and (relatively) physically un-harmed. But this outcome often does not consider the mental or emotional well-being of the mother. A mother’s emotional responses to child birth “can spill over and impact how women parent, how they relate with their partners, and even how they feel about themselves.” (8)
- ❖ Gould tells us that it is possible to support a woman in childbirth “so she feels mentally healthy afterwards, without compromising safety in any way.” (9) To do this, we (parents, care givers, institutions) need to “enable women (with support and information) to be involved in the decision-making in their births and acknowledg[e] women’s expert insights into their own bodies.” (9)
- ❖ Does birth matter? The answer is a resounding YES! “The feelings we bring home about birth can affect our experiences of parenting our new babies.” Confidence, joy and strength can help establish bonding, whereas fear, isolation and confusion can make bonding difficult, and leave

women having a sense of failure. Having an informed role in the decisions of birth creates better emotional and physical outcomes for all.

- ❖ Bruijin and Gould are NOT advising women to ignore the advice of their care giver! Gould suggests just to “look further afield for birthing information and knowledge” than the hospital antenatal class.
- ❖ A proven successful way to ensure that the mother’s needs are met is to have birth support by someone who not only understands the physiological and emotional needs of the mother, but also how the health system works. Doulas can fill both needs.
- ❖ “Research indicates that continuous caregiver support during childbirth has a number of benefits, including a ‘reduction of the need for medical intervention..., a tendency for shorter labors, and a reduction of negative feelings about one’s childbirth experience.” (11) Obstetricians and midwives often cannot be continuous caregivers because of organizational and institutional limitations.
- ❖ Most importantly – be involved in the decision-making process. Know which questions to ask, so you can assess the situation. To do this, use the acronym “B.R.A.N.” to obtain the information YOU need to make better, more informed decisions:
 - **Benefits:** What are the *Benefits* of this intervention?
 - **Risks:** What are the *Risks* of this intervention?
 - **Alternatives:** Are there any *Alternatives* to this procedure?
 - **Nothing:** What would happen if we did *Nothing*? (Or, do we have to act *Now*?)
- ❖ Women’s personal stories about traumatic or negative births are the reasons Gould and Bruijin started Birthtalk.org. Many women realize only AFTER their births that they did not feel informed, or part of the decision-making process. Regret often comes not from the events of birth, but by not feeling apart of the process, or feeling that they were intentionally uninformed.
- ❖ The goal, for Bruijin and Gould is not merely “alive mother and baby,” but “empowered healthy mother and healthy baby.” (12)

Resources

Full references for each article are available at <http://pathwaystofamilywellness.org/references.html>

All of our Pathways articles are now archived by topic. You can access all of our previous articles on Pregnancy and Birth Here: pathwaystofamilywellness.org/labels/pregnancy-and-birth.html

Birthtalk - birthtalk.org

Take a survey on your own birth experience and see hospital intervention rates thebirthsurvey.org

Another resource for checking the intervention and c-section rates in your area - www.cesareanrates.com/hospital-level-cesarean-rates

Resources for a Healthy Pregnancy and Birth: www.makinmiracles.com/resources.html

The Essential Ingredient: Doula is a documentary produced by DONA International in 2010 featuring commentary by all of DONA International's esteemed founders and some of its celebrated past presidents speaking on the origin and rationale of doula support. [Watch the Essential Ingredient here!](http://youtu.be/u792CxDT7cE) (<http://youtu.be/u792CxDT7cE>)