

Talking Points & Resources

Hello Pathways Connect Group Participants,

Preliminary note: There is no wrong way

To run your Pathways Connect Gathering, the steps below are to help guide you. However, we encourage you to embrace the flow of your gathering and allow for your meeting to take on its own momentum in whatever direction it might go.

Step 1: Select topics

Prior to your group gathering, find and select one or more of the magazine articles that you found interesting and want to share. Pick topics that make you passionate, as these are the easiest to talk about and spark discussion.

Step 2: The Gathering

Welcome everyone present in the group and ask each person to introduce themselves and share a little about themselves. Be sure to share about yourself as well.

Step 3: Introduce the topic

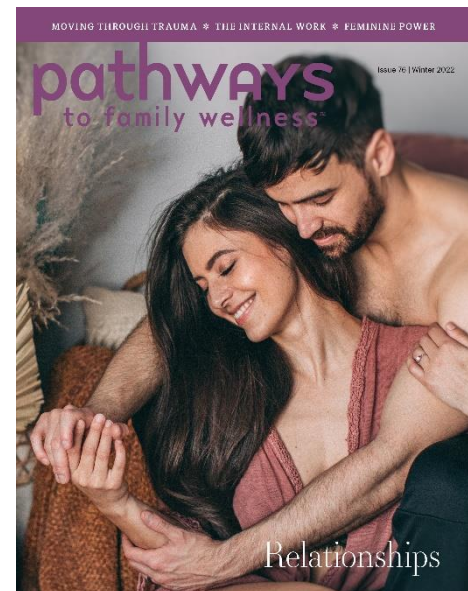
Share with the group your topic and why you chose it, why it interests you, and the importance you see in it. Summarize the article (some article summaries are provided below). You can read the entire article or article summary out loud to your group and share your thoughts at this time.

Step 4: Encourage conversation

We provide questions after each summary section that will help people to engage. Make use of these questions or devise your own.

Step 5: Make the chiropractic connection

At the end of each article summary are notes about how this topic relates to chiropractic. If you utilize these meetings to educate parents on the importance of chiropractic care you will be benefitting your office growth and the health of your community!



PW Issue #76 Introduction: Relationships

This issue explores the polarity between two people in a loving relationship. It explores the ways we can harness this polarity for family well-being, beginning with the sacred event of birth. Men and women each have a vital role to play in birth.

Most new fathers are unaware of their role, and because of this, a gap has formed in the birth conversation that can be filled for great benefit to the family. When this gap is filled, fathers become the true guardians of the birth experience, recognizing their innate ability to protect and serve their loved one's emotional and mental journey. To do this, it is essential that mothers and fathers to learn ways to work together in preparation for birth.

Many women have understood the value of birth stories. Birth stories help illuminate the unknowns and mysteries of the journey through pregnancy and birth. Stories often focus on several elements such as *what happened*, *where it happened*, and *why* a positive experience can be achieved by others. With these stories, we become more aware and trusting of the birth process.

Men benefit from birth stories too, however they begin to truly shine when they learn birth skills with their partners. Birth skills provide the practical ways to ourselves offer support. This then introduces a key element into the birth story, expounding on *what we can do for ourselves*. There are many skills mothers and fathers can learn in preparation for birth that will help them participate in the birth process like never before. Both partners can become skilled for the activity of birth, and with the help of this skills-based approach, they can learn how to prepare the body and mind for this sacred event.

Once engaged in the journey with the help of this new element, fathers cease to be another passenger in the process. They become active participants, and this informed engagement elevates the journey and rejuvenates the family relationship, providing a ground upon which fathers can participate confidently in the newborn stages of parenting.

The polarity inherent in a loving relationship changes during pregnancy and birth. It is natural and beneficial that a mother leads the way forward in this dance of life. Biologically, she is being transformed on so many levels, and spiritually, she is being given access to the inner wisdom that knows, better than anyone else ever could, the best ways forward. Birth is one of the epitomes of feminine power and strength. Men need not be lost during this time. They can honor and support their partners to an amazing capacity, if they know how.

This issue explores avenues for discovering the "how" by which families can support their journey own through pregnancy, birth and beyond. It explores the ways men can step into their strength and resolve. In many ways, this issue is a gift to fathers.

PW #76 Talking Points, Group Questions, and the Chiropractic Connection**Taking the Step*****Fear of Birth***

By Cheryl van der Mark, D.C.

How can you start to trust that your body was designed to have a baby?

In this article, Cheryl van der Mark discusses her experience with many families traveling through the journey of pregnancy and birth. Society has taught us from a young age that we need to depend on others at birth, relying on some authority to “extract” and deliver our babies. Yet this narrative comes from the lost recognition of the amazing intelligence within each mother and baby, capable of not only forming the new individual human being, but of birthing that individual into the world.

In the midst of this amazing process, we still have doubts leading into it, and not without reason! Birth is a mystery in many ways. Yet in place of awe and trust, we have devolved into fear that has then led to a dependence on a system that seemingly “has it all figured out.” This system has advantages in certain circumstances, of course, yet there has developed an overdependence on the system, for reasons that are not out of pure necessity but are largely due to loss of family-centered support, trust, and empowering knowledge.

“Many years ago, my husband and I birthed three beautiful children, using my own self-taught birth skills, and a passion was born.”

From her own experiences, Cheryl began to share with her clients a new kind of birth model that would re-inspire their trust, support, and knowledge for themselves.

“I started teaching parents birthing classes based on physiology, anatomy, empowerment, and the interplay of the mind, the nervous system...”

What families learned were the “hows” of birth, how to give birth in congruence with their innate resources and intelligence. And to their great enjoyment, this led the way for hundreds and hundreds of families to attain elevated, extraordinarily positive birth experiences.

“How can you start to understand the natural birth process? How can you break down the walls of fear that society has placed on you?”

Cheryl offers 10 key starting points in her article for families to begin this journey. The last, #10, in this preliminary article, represents one of many of its kind that are so infrequently emphasized in birth preparation courses: “Practice, practice, practice relaxation techniques,

meditations, supportive postures and pelvic floor awareness.” In following articles, we will explore more of these.

Questions for Consideration:

- If you’ve had a birth, what were your fears leading up to it?
- Do you know anyone who was fearless leading up to their first birth?
- What was your experience of fear during the birth itself?
- If you could whisper back through time, what words would you tell yourself, if anything, in the moments or hours leading up to your birth?
- Every birth is unique. Why do we tend to judge births?
- What do you believe are some of the key factors in a positive birth experience?
- Do you believe we can actively prepare for birth using skills-based classes?

Chiropractic Connection:

Cheryl’s experience as a chiropractor is that Webster chiropractic care combined with a skills-based learning class in preparation for birth, can lead to substantial improvements in anyone’s birth experience. Chiropractic care on its own has often been attested as “the key” by many families who achieve a great and positive birth experience. One thing chiropractic care implicitly offers is a *shift in focus* onto the structure and function of the body leading up to birth. Too often, families are left to envision birth as an event predominately based on “choices,” similar to a wedding or a vacation. So often, birth exceeds our expectations when it is discovered, on the spot, that this event is in fact *an activity* that engages the whole of our being. Families who utilize chiropractic care are knowingly and unknowingly learning to prepare the mind in alignment with birth as an activity, involving the structure and function of their body. That alone would be a powerful benefit. Yet on top of this, chiropractic opens and balances the pelvis with exceptional care, and frees the nervous system of the whole body to perform its physiological functioning leading up to birth and throughout birth.

The births of tomorrow will need not be anticipated with fear or doubt, but can be embraced with unbelievable trust and resolve. The moment a family learns of the functional, active approach to birth—one may call it the chiropractic approach—then their journey shifts, and they become aligned to the birth *as it is*, a dance or a journey in the fullest breadth.

Staying the Course
The Internal Work:
A Beloved Childbirth Preparation Skill
By Wintergreen

Not dissimilar to perineal massage, although far more involved and effective, the Internal Work is a birth preparation skill offering benefits for pregnancy and birth that are only just beginning to be utilized in the world at large. This skill was born from the experience of hundreds of fathers and mothers learning to navigate through their births with greater ease, comfort, and empowerment.

Here's why families developed this skill: "They wanted their vaginal birth to be forthright, to not last for hours, and to not damage them or their baby. They wanted to recover from a vaginal birth without the very common issues that women experience, some of which last for years, such as a sore tailbone, loose vaginal tone, pain having sex, prolapses, or peeing when coughing, running, or laughing."

The goals of this work are as follows:

1. Reduce potential short or long-term trauma to your body during second stage labor.
2. Reduce potential trauma to your baby during second stage labor.
3. Allow for an easier, safer second stage labor.
4. Learn the space to be able to assess where we are in labor.

1. *Reduce short and long-term trauma to your body during second stage labor.*

The effect of the internal work is to prepare the soft tissues of the body in the space that will soon become the second-stage passageway of the baby at birth. Families learn of their sensitivities in this area prior to birth, and can work to greatly soften and alleviate those sensitivities before the baby arrives. This offers a tremendous first-hand benefit of alleviating the cause of what can become a primary source of tension and dystocia from the muscles and tissues of the body contracting where the baby comes out. When we prepare the tissues, they becomes less sensitive to pressures that would otherwise lead to reactive tightening.

2. *Reduce potential trauma to your baby during second stage labor.*

Because the tissues and muscles of the internal space can become restricted or tensed when sensations overcome our ability to relax and soften during the birth, the Internal Work offers an invaluable method of preparing this space to protect the baby's journey through the passage. Essentially, it protects the baby from undue restrictions caused by our own unexpected reaction to the pain sensations. Preparing the tissue allows us to soften amid the sensations, because we are now familiar with that space and have conditioned the tissues for greater ease, and perhaps, greater physiological function. This helps the baby in his or her descent through the birth canal.

3. Allow for an easier, safer second stage labor.

It follows from the above that this tissue familiarity and preparation will naturally lead to easier second stages. Families report not only easier second stages, but faster births, and faster recoveries after birth. During second-stage vaginal birth, the potential for trauma really rests on the tension we experience during this stage, and our ability to relax through the tensions. Perineal massage, which works to bring blood flow to the perineal tissues of the pelvic floor are often last-minute attempts to ease the tension of the outer tissues during this stage. However, when practiced leading up to birth, and by involving the full-breadth of tissue in the pelvic floor area and the internal space, we can assure less tension/pain and fewer traumas, while achieving greater tissue elasticity, better, faster healing, and safer, easier births.

4. Learn the space to be able to assess where we are in labor.

One of common complaints in birth is not knowing “where we are at,” especially after a long time has passed while in labor. By preparing the internal space, parents learn how to assess the progress of their labor autonomously. They can “check” to see how far dilated they are, and using the knowledge gained by the Internal Work, they can gain an easy assessment of their progress. In this article, Wintergreen offers instructions to help parents ascertain the difference between the various “effacements” and what to expect as the labor progresses as the cervix dilates.

“Checking where you are helps enormously to adapt during the activity of birth, including which positions to take and which skills to apply. The Internal Work allows us to know and feel good knowing where we are. Families who have done the work know it works. But we have to do it ourselves for it to work.”

Questions for Consideration:

- During second stage labor, did you experience intense tensions or a burning sensation?
- Have you heard of, or had experience with, perineal massage at birth? How did this help?
- How would you describe the sensations of your second stage labor? Did these sensations cause any internal or muscular tensions?
- Was there a need for episiotomy or vacuum extraction in your birth? Do you think the Internal Work would have lessened the likelihood of these interventions?
- What are some methods you employed to relax and soften the birth canal amid second stage labor?

Chiropractic Connection:

Chiropractic represents a superb way to prepare the body for birth. There are three components—or three “P’s” to every birth involving the mother’s Power, Passage, and Passenger. By aligning and adjusting the pelvis, chiropractors help facilitate each of these

components. In addition to chiropractic care, there are many “skills” parents can learn to prepare the body for birth. When families learn skills for themselves, they become more autonomous over their birth process. They acquire internal resources that allows them to navigate birth no matter the circumstances that unfold. It has been seen by many families how preparing the body with chiropractic improves their overall birth experience. The more families engage in the activity of birth and learn ways to navigate their experience, they easily feel more empowered and more capable of achieving a positive experience amid any stresses that may come.

Staying the Course
50 Ways to Support Your Partner In Birth
By Kate Rose

Partners and fathers at birth can offer so much help when they are equipped with the knowledge and skills to do so. This article offers 50 suggestions for partners to help in the labor process, depending on the circumstances, such as:

Is she feeling overwhelmed?

If her belly hurts...

If she is having trouble relaxing...

If she is too hot...

If her back hurts...

If her legs and arms are shaking...

If her contractions stop...

Additional to these general suggestions, parents approaching birth can work together in learning more in-depth skillsets (see pg. 20 in this issue). The more we learn and practice skills together, the greater will be a father or partner's positive involvement. With a little practice, teamwork naturally arises such that fathers learn instinctively through non-vocal communication skills what to do, and how to do it.

A long-standing hope within the birth conversation is how to evolve men into fathers. Fathers at birth can become empowered to step into their fatherhood role, where birth acts as a positive initiation for their service to the family, and what we find more and more is that fathers represent one very important key to improving birth in the world.

Questions for Consideration:

- Many women have hired a doula to offer skillful support during labor. Did you have a doula present at birth? How was your experience of her support?
- Was your husband or partner involved in the birth? How did he report his experience after the birth?
- Many fathers are themselves traumatized by birth, when they don't know how to help, and feel helpless. Have you known any fathers who felt this way?
- Would your partner be excited to learn birth skills with you?
- What is the father's role at birth?

Chiropractic Connection:

Many chiropractors in the field of pregnancy and birth will have children and will relay their story. Often, they are happy to say they could utilize their professional skills in the process of their own birth. Women married to a chiropractor often have a positive experience of their loved one's active participation. While chiropractic care at birth should be a more common experience—birth centers and hospitals “should” have a chiropractor at every birth—this experience at present is reserved for only a few lucky families. One of the important additions to the emerging childbirth conversation is how families can learn skills of their own, which allows them to offer self-support in powerful ways. Chiropractic is a very helpful support leading up to birth. And when families have things they themselves can “do” during the activity of birth, they too achieve this amazing experience of active teamwork and participation from their partners.

Living the Journey*The Way of the Superior Man*

By David Deida

“The Way of the Superior Man is more relevant than ever. New styles of sexual expression are emerging as old roles for men and women are rapidly dissolving. In this new world, women are taking the lead. Men, no longer the sole breadwinner or the most purpose-driven member of the household, are rediscovering their worth, both in the world and in relationship.”

In the modern world and in the generations of humans alive today, men and women in relationship have been given many challenges to overcome. There is a gender-rift that exists underneath our feet, and has greatly devolved the health of our sexual relationships. Many families struggle to maintain a healthy relationship, even when things are going well for them “on paper.” One of the things that is desperately needed, according to David Deida and others, is a revitalization of the masculine energy in men.

Men and women have had to adapt through a cultural progression that is far more difficult to navigate than we like to admit. Rather than trying to appeal to these cultural standards set forth for our generation, we need to become our own leaders, and re-define for ourselves what truly satisfies and elevates “relationship” at its core. This is becoming known today in rapid pace. The key is polarity.

The state of relationships, of rising divorce statistics, and especially of declining measures of happiness in male-female relationship in the world today, demands a thorough review of the ideal male-female relationship. And such a review kindles an adventure to attain what has always existed within the sexes, but has become obscured or lost. For men, their part to play is becoming clearer. And once the path is seen and observed, it becomes an exciting challenge for them to rise to path. To the great benefit of both men and their loving partners, men can, and must, step forward into their masculinity.

In this article, David Deida offers a humble, though vitally important place to start.

Breathe Down the Front

“All men tend to have blocks in the front of their body, along an imaginary line that runs from the top of the head, through the tongue, throat, heart, solar plexus, navel, and genitals, down to the perineum. When you get nervous, your stomach tightens. When you are threatened, your solar plexus feels queasy. When you think hard, your forehead wrinkles. When you consider the unsure future, you tense your jaw. For much of the day, you are tightening, tensing, and contracting the front of your body, from the top of your head, through your chest, and all the way down past your gut.”

This tension down the front, experienced as anxiety or fear, is simply the knotted POWER that could be expressed in many ways as valuable gifts to the world, once they are transformed from the “anxious knot” into something more attractive and enlivening.

“Right now, notice your breath. Are you inhaling so deeply you feel your genitals bulging slightly? Is your belly rising and falling with your inhale and exhale, like a mighty bellows? Your belly and lower abdomen are special places of power. If your breath does not reach these areas, you can’t recharge your batteries. You will feel weak and unsure of yourself. Your effect in the world will be minimal, less than your full potential.”

Following Deida’s breath exercise, (and reading his book as a start) men can begin the journey of awakening their divine masculine energy so as to express it for the benefit of themselves, their lovers, and the world.

Questions for Consideration:

- What would you say women in general want in a man?
- In the last 2 or 3 generations, have men changed? What positive ways has culture changed men? What negative ways has culture changed men? Do you see the negative effects in your own life?
- What are the highlight experiences of your man, from your memory?
- What are some ways you would like your man to step into their true masculine energy?
- Does it feel threatening if your partner steps into this energy?
- There is almost always a masculine/feminine polarity in relationships, regardless of the couples gender or sex. This polarity can swap, become heightened, or become dampened. What are the benefits of maximizing this polarity?
- What are ways to help encourage young boys to better navigate the dynamics of male-female relationships.
- Do you notice children holding their power in and becoming knotted along the front of their body?
- Who are your children’s masculine role-models in life?

Chiropractic Connection:

Nature is the mother of the human species, and we were not created to be inherently brutish or “animalistic” in the negative sense that this term is often used. Yet this has been the assumption of our culture, and the seeming goal of education has been to strip mankind of its inherent nature out of fear of Nature. In effect, this has led to the suppression of that which may very well be our greatest ally. This ally is known as our “instinct” our “intuition” yet it is the driving impulse of Life itself. There is a tremendous beauty in the natural differences between the sexes. There is also a tremendous utility in our unique gifts as men and women.

However, within every human being, there is also a tremendous degree of freedom to be able to play, modify, or resist our inherent nature. The seeming “need” to resist or suppress our own nature is, if anything, symptomatic of a deeper problem. Never is suppression a true or ideal solution, for it always tends to augment and aggravate that which is suppressed.

The hope in all true healing models is not only to achieve physiological well-being, but to reach a higher state of human potential—coherence and love. “Health” in the larger meaning is about a multi-leveled “evolution.” We can all become better. And we all are given the keys to do so.

One of the philosophical tenets of chiropractic is that our innate potential is contained within, as an innate intelligence of our soul, mind, or being, synonymous with Life. This intelligence is something to be known to the best of our ability, and above all expressed. Yet for the expression to be as it was designed, as Nature intended it, and therefore, as a force for great gifts and positive evolution, we must learn how to resolve and dissolve the many tensions of suppression, misalignment, and incoherence that have incurred over time, causing us to lose sight and touch of this innate intelligence. When these inhibiting factors are discovered and dissolved, we can then step more fully into our inborn potential—something we might one day address as beautiful, intelligent, and deserving of our highest trust.