

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

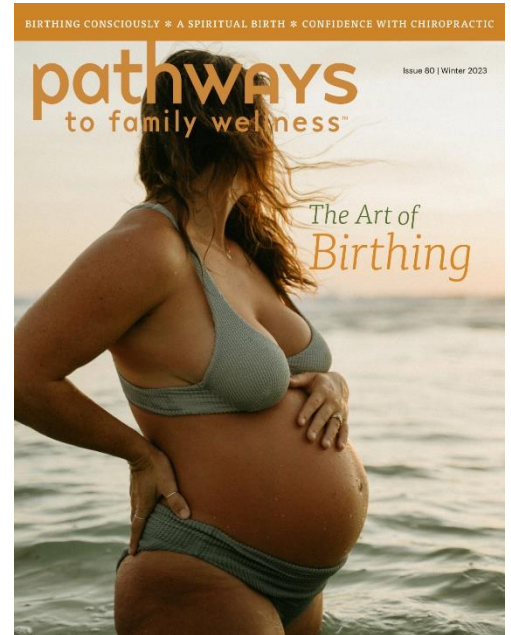
Share with the group your topic and why you chose it, why it interests you, and the importance you see in it. Summarize the article (some article summaries are provided below). You can read the entire article or article summary out loud to your group and share your thoughts at this time.

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 benefiting your office growth and the health of your community!



PW Issue #80 Introduction: The Art of Birthing

This issue features an important theme that we hope to continue discussing in Pathways. We are entering a *New Birth Trend* in society which recognizes and takes advantage of the reality that every birth is an activity that each mother does with her baby. While it is absolutely true that every birth is a normal, natural, and physiological process of the body, we are now learning how to bring our conscious, informed “doing” into the setting of birth, rather than relying solely on trust in the body or in experts. When our sense of conscious, internal control combines with our physiological trust or our ability to surrender to the process, then birth becomes an art and a dance. Within this framework, the father, husband, or partner can consciously learn how to participate in the birth activity with pragmatic support and a vital element for family empowerment.

Every birth is an activity of allowing the body to open and soften amid cervical contractions, to allow a baby to enter the world. In this activity, our conscious minds will be present and engaged, and there will be this moment-to-moment question: “What to do?” At each moment, there are two actions one can take:

- 1) Surrender, or let go, (and possibly relax and enjoy the moment.)
- 2) Employ conscious skills (actions intended to increase the ease of birth) that we learned beforehand or that we may discover on the go, in the moment.

Both actions can come together harmoniously and are not contradictory. If we look at any activity in human affairs, learning skills and practicing for the activity doesn’t inhibit our ability to enter into a flow state and “let go.” Often, such practice enables a flow state to occur with greater effect! If we think of cooking, driving, sex, running, or any other activity we do, practicing for the activity adds to the quality of our experience by enhancing our confidence in ourselves leading up to, and during it. This self-confidence is perhaps the key takeaway about the importance of this new birth trend. It is hard to trust the body to do an activity for us if we have never done it before. Therefore, it is normal and natural to learn skills and preparation techniques to embody and practice for this physiological activity leading up to the birth.

There is no knowing what our birth will be like. But we do know two things. We will have to surrender to the journey, and we will be conscious during the physiological activity and that conscious awareness will guide our actions. Preparing for birth, learning about the art of birth, practicing for birth, and honing pragmatic skills to do the activity with greater ease, allows us to gain a reliable self-confidence for this conscious activity. And this *new trend in birth* allows us to involve the father in vitally pragmatic ways, to set up an empowering beginning for the upcoming parenting journey in life.

PW #80 Talking Points, Group Questions, and the Chiropractic Connection

Taking the Step *Confidence with Chiropractic*

By Jen Santos, D.C.

Barbara's Story

Barbara is a mother whose birth experience is widespread. She desired a particular birth outcome, and felt robbed or violated when that experience didn't unfold as planned. Because of this, she had guilt and shame.

Discovering chiropractic for her second pregnancy, she realized something that gave her validation and relief. The ICPA trained chiropractor recognized, after assessing her pelvis, that "it's no wonder a baby couldn't make its way through here!"

In other words, there was a logical and sensible reason for Barbara's traumatic experience, and it had to do with tension in her pelvis, which before chiropractic, she had no idea existed.

Seeing her chiropractic "at least weekly," and sending for her during her labor, Barbara came to experience a totally different birth experience. "Dr. Jen told me and my midwife that this was the best my pelvis had ever looked. The adjustment moved the labor along quickly, and hearing that my pelvis was good gave me a lot of confidence."

Leading up to birth, Barbara achieved restoration and confidence with chiropractic for her second birth.

Questions for Consideration:

- What are ways you have tried to increase confidence for birth?
- Does anyone have experience with chiropractic leading up to their first birth?
- Prior to chiropractic, were you conscious of your pelvis, its tension, and factors related to the pelvic opening that are important for the birth activity?
- What are some of the reasons why pragmatic considerations such as pelvic balance and mobility are not widely discussed in the birth conversation, outside of chiropractic?
- Is birth something you can control or improve through physical preparation?

Chiropractic Connection:

The Webster technique began as a way to improve infant mobility within the womb, and quickly grew to become a leading method of preparing the body for birth. Within this model of birth preparation, much emphasis gets placed on the body and the pelvis. With this awareness, parents learn of the importance of birth from the context of an embodied activity. The baby needs to come down, though, and out, and Webster supports our body's ability to do this. From this, many families gain confidence in themselves, as well as a new framework for engaging with the birth activity.

There is so much to be developed out of the "Webster approach to birth" which emphasizes the physical aspect that families can control within the birth process. In addition to Webster chiropractic care, families can learn pragmatic skills that enhance the Webster technique's effectiveness. Visit Pathwaystofamilywellness.org, or look inside this issue, for a listing of prospective birth skills methods families (including fathers) can learn in the comfort of their homes.

Feature***Birthing Consciously***

By Wintergreen

The 5 Phases of Each Contraction

Birth is unpredictable. We don't know before it happens whether it will be "easy" or "insufferable", whether it will last for 5 hours or 5 days. However, we do know that birth is a series of contractions, each one following a pattern and rhythm that we can identify, learn about, hone, and work with to effect greater ease. This article is a detailed instruction manual to begin to do just this.

Central to our awareness of the phases of each contraction are the "skills" or conscious actions we can take that align with the rhythm of the contraction. A contraction has 5 phases: A beginning, an intensification, a peak, and a relaxation phase. This is followed by the 5th phase of a rest-period that precedes the next contraction. At each phase, we can learn and use breathing skills to "ride the wave" of the contraction.

Many families who employ skills still have to suffer the intensity of a contraction. In other words, breathing skills don't make birth automatically easy (or at least, no skills have been discovered to make birth reliably easy.) However, regardless of the intensity we experience, birth skills allow us to manage the physiological activity of contractions that open the cervix. Often, families who don't know to become skilled, or don't have any skills passed on to them, will experience the common intensity of contractions, but in addition, will suffer the far more unsettling fate of not knowing what to do about it! This completely changes for the better with the addition of birth skills, which give us something pragmatic "to do" amid the process.

At the end of this article, Wintergreen discusses the importance of the contraction's "peak phase" or phase 3. She describes the difference between an "effective" contraction that successfully works to open up the cervix, and a non-effective contraction that "plateaus" or "fizzles out" without a peak to the contraction (often due to a mother's positioning in labor). Though the peak of a contraction is more intense to move through, it is also a positive, reliable sign that the baby is opening the body for a successful birth—hence something to be encouraged. To be able to encourage a peak contraction, by learning skills that help us ride the wave of each individual contraction, moment to moment, is a central part of the "art of birthing" that this article (and issue of Pathways) is presenting.

Questions for Consideration:

- Prior to this article, what did you know about a “contraction?” What is your partner’s knowledge about what a “contraction” is?
- What were contractions like for you in your birth? Did they result in tension in the body, specifically in the pelvic soft tissues? Did you think of consciously working to relieve that tension? If not, can you imagine practicing doing this for the next birth?
- What is the hardest part about an intense cervical contraction? Do you think a skilled partner or husband could help you overcome the intensity, by being there with you, guiding your use of skills?
- Some women experience naturally easy births. Do you think there is a secret to making easy births happen?

Chiropractic Connection:

In the 1980’s, Larry Webster developed the Webster technique to prepare the pelvis for easier, safer births. Simultaneously, though independently, fathers and mothers in the United States were developing pragmatic “birthing skills” that they could use to help them in the activity of birth, centered on preparing the pelvis and learning how to work through and manage labor contractions; to ease and support the baby’s journey through the pelvic soft tissues. These skills have come down to us today in the form of a resource called BirthingBetter.org. And there are other resources that developed thereafter.

What’s so significant is how the Webster technique and these self-learned, family-centered skills are redefining the birth conversation at large, where the emphasis or focus on birth goes to the activity of giving birth, rather than just the choices we have surrounding birth options. Many people are familiar with the focus on normal physiology—allowing the body to do its thing. Not as many are familiar with the approach to birth that emphasizes our conscious participation as “active doers” in the process. We can become “skilled” to do this activity, and those skills will apply no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in.

Webster chiropractic care is so valuable because it achieves two things. It supports our normal physiology—the body’s innate intelligence—and it opens up the discussion of how we can consciously participate in preparing the body and mind for the activity of birth. For many, Webster chiropractic really begins the journey of developing a mindset of “skillsets” to gain self-confidence in traversing, navigating, and embodying the physiological birth experience. When we observe the research known as Salutogenesis, we observe another vital chiropractic connection to this new birth conversation. Webster chiropractic represents a vital resource that improves our “comprehensibility” and “manageability” of the stresses of birth. What we are

learning here, is how seeing and preparing for birth as an activity, and learning ways to journey through this activity together, are vital in improving our “comprehensibility” and “manageability” of birth, which in Salutogenesis research represents the prominent keys to assuring “health” and “well-being”.

Taking the Step*Why Counterpressure in Labor is Counterproductive*

By Kristen Burgess

Most families know about counter pressure to relieve back pain in labor. Yet, few know about its counterproductive side.

Part of the brilliance of the “skills-based” approach to birth, is the pragmatic sense-making of the birthing activity—a baby is opening the body to emerge into the world. Simple! Yet complex...

Back labor pain is due to several factors, the foremost one being a baby’s positioning, causing pressure up against the sacrum, resulting in discomfort for the mother. Though counter pressure can be helpful to ease the pain, it is simultaneously making the passage more difficult for the baby. The baby is pressing up against the sacrum because it is short on room, space, openness, softness, etc.

What is ideal in situations like this is to address the underlying cause of the back labor, which has to do with baby positioning, as well as tightness, constriction, or rigidity in the pelvic passageway. Many of these factors can be addressed consciously by the parents in labor, by learning and using pragmatic “birth skills.” Others can be addressed by a professional, such as chiropractors.

This article discusses self-initiated methods for addressing several of these factors, especially how we can understand, and work with, our baby’s positioning in a way that is ideal for labor success.

Questions for Consideration:

- Did you, or someone you know, have “back labor?” Did you have any idea of what was causing it?
- What would you have done differently if you knew the cause of back labor to be associated with “space” and “tightness” in the pelvic area?
- In your labor, with or without back labor, do you recall any focus on trying to “soften” the body amid contractions? How about “moving the body” in a way to affect baby positioning?
- What is the benefit of parents becoming “self-skilled” rather than relying on a professional, assuming professionals even have skills for the “activity” of birth?

Chiropractic Connection:

A baby’s position in the body is one third of the equation of birth. It’s called the “Passenger” in obstetrics. The other two thirds are the “Passage” and the “Power.” The Passage refers to the pelvic tissues (both hard bone and soft tissue), and Power refers to the mother’s uterine strength and muscles, as well as her “state of coherence” and energy level. These three elements are referred to as the “Three P’s” of birth.

Chiropractic helps all three.

A chiropractic adjustment improves the state of the Passage, especially to help open space and create balance in the uterus, via a focus on important ligaments that attach to the uterus. This in turn affects the Passenger, who will have greater space to move. The chiropractic adjustment also profoundly affects the woman’s “Power” by helping align the body and nervous system, so that ideal physiological function unfolds. In addition to this, the chiropractic “model” of approaching birth also does so much for the “Three P’s” by bringing a family’s attention to the pelvis, it’s balance and preparedness, and to then to grow an embodied awareness of this space which can expand with the family’s own efforts of learning “birth skills.” Not to mention, the chiropractic philosophy and guidance which helps families make informed choices.

Does this mean chiropractic will remove the chance of back labor? No. But it absolutely will improve a family’s ability to cope, manage, and stay on top of the activity of birth, if back labor occurs. This is the essence of the chiropractic “Salutogenic” approach to birth—improving our sense of coherence throughout the activity of birth.

Staying the Course

The Time I Had a Freebirth in a Hospital

By Maryn Green

Freebirth was coined by a matriarch philosopher and wisdom keeper of the natural, physiological birth movement, Jeannine Parvati Baker. She said it this way: “Freebirth is giving birth in fullest freedom without paying anyone to be paranoid for you.”

With this definition, many can understand that “Freebirth” is quite rare in a hospital. Or to put it differently, it is rare in a hospital to experience freedom to do as one pleases, combined with an absence of attendees who are paranoid about some aspect of your journey, such as potential “risks” or extended timeline.

This article discusses the story of a mother who had what she deemed to be an ecstatic freebirth in a hospital. Fascinatingly, she describes how, in the height of the Covid lockdowns, her transfer to the hospital did not lead to the doctors “taking over.” She and her doula, alone with their baby, and fully engaged in the activity of birth, experienced a hospital staff that truly were “hands off” and unperturbed by the family’s desire to give birth without external help. They did not “check” her, or administer an IV. They placed a fetal monitor as per the request of the mother, but did not involve themselves beyond what was asked. She gave birth vaginally within the hour of arriving.

There may be many reasons for why this unlikely experience occurred. One major one is due to the fact that this was the author’s 10th birth. And what this means, is that the author knew “how to give birth.” And no one doubted it.

When birth attendants (including midwives, but more often OB’s and nurses), see a birth unfolding where the birther is unable to cope, manage, or stay on top of the activity, they are instinctively more likely to want to “help” in whatever ways they were trained to do. During the home-birth, the mother of this story was in full control, but for some reason that she still is not certain of, she needed to transfer to a hospital. “This was what my baby needed.”

Simply speaking, when you’ve given birth 9 times, you are going to demonstrate a level of mastery over this activity that commands respect. This is what the author experienced, transferring to the hospital for the first time in 10 births. However, you can achieve some level of mastery and command over the birth activity prior to ever having a birth. (See birth skills.)

Many women are realizing that they can experience freedom in birth **despite** external restrictions (planned or unplanned circumstances), and that they can achieve confidence and empowerment

despite external paranoia from others (planned or unplanned). Though restrictions and paranoia may be present, a family can give birth in a “freebirth” way, DESPITE external factors. And this opens up a discussion, and really a whole new paradigm, of understanding what a “birth revolution” can ultimately achieve. It can achieve innate autonomy and empowerment ***no matter our challenges or circumstances.***

Questions for Consideration:

- Have you ever heard the term “freebirth?”
- Would you consider that your birth experience was a freebirth experience?
- Is it possible to be completely free of all paranoia about birth?
- Imagine having 9 births, and then giving birth again. How might you imagine that experience to be?
- Consider birth as an activity that you do with your body. From this vantage, what might you do to practice and prepare for that activity?

Chiropractic Connection:

Many chiropractors have suggested that every birth would benefit from a Webster chiropractor being present. Many families have enjoyed the presence of chiropractors at their home, while giving birth. The adjustment seems to so often help bring labor to a new level of engagement and progress. To be “free” at birth is a big, almost spiritual topic, with many unmeasurable factors. Confidence ultimately provides the greatest resource for freedom, in any activity in life. How do we grow our confidence for birth? Chiropractic care is a major confidence factor for many. Combined with this, birth skills and preparation represent a whole new level of confidence building. Combined with conscious respect and support for the normal physiology of the body, the future of birth looks tremendous once we begin to shift the cultural conversation to the family’s *intrinsic power* and promote pragmatic ways to grow and develop it.