

Characteristics of Effective Birth Plans

If you decide to use a written birth plan, you want to be read and respected. Here are some tips to help you create a birth plan which will maximize your chances of getting what you want. Good birth plans are:

1. *Short.* Most doctors dislike long conversations, and this feeling carries over to things read. The more concise and pithy you can make your plan, the more likely it is that your doctor will enjoy reading it. Nurses are very busy, and are already overwhelmed with paperwork. They will appreciate a birth plan that is short and to the point.
2. *Realistic and Relevant.* Make sure that the items you request are available, and that your wishes are appropriate to your personal medical situation. We believe it is best to write several plans, so that you may mention the relevant items only to the person responsible. For instance, your obstetrician doesn't need to know that you plan to delay the PKU test; your nursery nurse and pediatrician do.
3. *Positive.* Avoid a negative tone; try not to include the word "no". Instead of a long list of things you don't want, write a short statement about what you do want. For instance, "We are hoping to have a natural birth as possible" or "We would really like you to take extra time to explain everything to us to help us come to a decision."
4. *Personal.* Your doctor and nurses would rather read something you write yourself than a perfect birth plan you get from a book or the internet. The more individual you make it, the more likely it is to catch attention and be meaningful.
5. *Feeling Based.* It is best not to refer to studies or books, but to talk about your own feelings and experiences. No medical professional likes to have it implied that you know their business better than they do; but no one can argue about your feelings.

What to avoid:

1. *Inflexibility.* Doctors are uncomfortable by plans which state that certain procedures absolutely will not be done. The best plans assume that communication will continue during labor, and that no options are entirely off limits.
2. *Implications of Unethical Behavior.* Birth plans often contain a statement such as "I do not want a cesarean unless it is medically necessary." This statement implies that the doctor regularly does unnecessary cesarean, and is justifiably offensive. Instead, stick to statements about feelings: "I would be terribly upset and disappointed if I needed to have a cesarean."
3. *Hostility.* If you start with the assumption that the medical staff want to help you have the experience you desire, you are more likely to make friends who will advocate for you. Starting with the attitude that the medical team are enemies will create unnecessary defensiveness and anger.

Birth Plan Worksheet

Name: _____ Due Date: _____

Primary Caregiver: _____

My support people will be: _____

Their role will be: _____

We realize that our birth plan is neither a contract or a guarantee of an uncomplicated labor. Our purpose is to introduce ourselves and to help you understand our preferences.

Introducing ourselves:

Important wishes, issues, fears, or concerns regarding mother and baby:

Preferences for managing labor and pain:

Preferences for Normal Labor and Birth

First stage of labor (positions, movement, comfort measures, food and beverage):

Second stage (positioning and pushing efforts):

Third stage and first hours after birth (for mother and baby):

Newborn Care Plan Worksheet

Newborn Care Preferences

for the baby of: _____

Baby's name: _____ Baby's doctor: _____

Infant Feeding _____ Breastmilk _____ Formula _____

Newborn concerns, issues, wishes, and/ or fears:

My previous experience with newborns:

Preferences Regarding Newborn Examinations and Procedures (immunization, circumcision, contact with baby, and routine procedures):

Preferences for unexpected problems for the baby:

Emotional needs (infant care, feeding, and so on):

Preferences for Unexpected Events

Induction, augmentation, or complicated labor:

Cesarean birth:

Premature or sick baby:

Stillbirth or death of baby:

Preferences for Postpartum in The Hospital for New Mother:

I plan to _____ Breastfeed _____ Formula Feed

Concerns and questions:

Feelings about visitors:

Controlling pain:

Educational needs:

Follow-up and discharge: