

BIRTHING NATURALLY

Fear and Anxiety Triggers

The process of giving birth is intensely physical work. For some mothers, giving birth consumes their thoughts and they shut off to the specifics of their surroundings and appearance. Other mothers find themselves overwhelmed with undue anxiety, stress, fear, resistance or tension to certain parts of the birth process. Sometimes family members react to these items with fear or anxiety. It can be helpful to identify the triggers which are most likely to cause trouble for you *before* labor begins so you can be prepared.

During labor your physical appearance will change. It is normal to:

- Be partially or completely naked;
- Look and sound as if you were in the height of passion;
- Smell sweaty and look as if you are working hard;
- Secrete urine, amniotic fluid and expel feces;
- Your vagina will bulge as the baby's head emerges.

If you give birth in a hospital, you may:

- Spend hours in a small hospital room;
- Have blood drawn;
- Have an IV;
- Be hooked up to various monitors and machines;
- Wear a hospital gown;
- Be restricted in your movement or asked to stay in bed.

Giving birth requires the use of sexual parts of your body. It is sometimes necessary to:

- Have your midwife perform an internal vaginal exam;
- Have instruments inserted into your vagina;
- Have your vagina cut or torn slightly;
- Have your vagina exposed to everyone in the room.

The experience of giving birth includes very powerful sensations from many parts of your body:

- The contractions you feel may be extremely painful;
- You may respond to the pain verbally or physically;
- You may not be able to control the urge to push;
- Your perineum may feel as if it is burning;
- Your perineum may feel sore for several days.

During labor, you may begin to feel as if:

- You are not able to express how you feel;
- You are completely out of control;
- Others are not listening to what you say;
- You do not have the strength to go on.

ARE YOU A SURVIVOR?

Women who have survived abuse, especially sexual abuse, are sometimes surprised to find themselves having unexpected extreme emotional reactions to childbirth.

Though you may not want everyone to know your past, you should consider letting your midwife and doula know you are a survivor. It will allow them to be prepared to give you the support you will need in labor.

If you are still working through the pain and trauma of abuse, it may be helpful to see a counselor during pregnancy. Highly emotional events from the past have a way of presenting themselves in the midst of giving birth.