

The Tough Times of Labour

How to Help a Woman through them

Reserve this for any time in labour when your partner hits an emotional low such as:

- She is in despair, weeps or cries out
- She wants to give up and feels she cannot go on
- She is very tense and cannot relax
- She is in a great deal of pain

Move in close and do all you can to help her until she regains her inner strength. Usually her despair is temporary; with your help she can pass through it and her spirits will rise.

Other things that may help:

REMAIN CALM. Your touch should be firm and confident. Your voice should remain CALM and encouraging.

STAY CLOSE BY HER SIDE, your face near hers.

ANCHOR HER. Hold her shoulders or her head in your hands gently, confidently, firmly or hold her tightly in your arms.

CHANGE YOUR RITUAL DURING CONTRACTIONS. Try a different position. Try changing the breathing pattern. Breathe with her or pace her with your hand or voice.

ENCOURAGE HER EVERY BREATH; guide her in the patterned breathing: “Breathe with me...Breathe with me...that’s the way...just like that...good...stay with it...just like that...look at me...good for you...it’s going away...good...good...now just rest. That was great.” You can whisper these words or say them in calm, encouraging tone of voice to get her attention. Try to keep your tone calm and confident.

TALK TO HER DURING CONTRACTIONS. Ask her if what you are doing is helpful. Make suggestions: for example, “with the next one, let me help you more. Look at me the moment it starts. We will breathe together so it won’t get ahead of us, okay? You are doing so well, we are really moving along now...”

REPEAT YOURSELF. She may not be able to continue to do what you say for more than a few seconds, but that’s fine. Say the same things again and help her continue.

WHAT IF SHE SAYS SHE CAN'T GO ON?

- **Don't give up on her.** This is a difficult time for her. You cannot help her if you decide she cannot handle it. Acknowledge to her and to yourself that it is difficult but not impossible.
- **Ask for help and reassurance.** The nurse, midwife or another person can help a lot—measuring dilation, giving you advice, doing some of the coaching, trying something new, even reassuring you that your partner is OK and that this is something normal.
- **Remind her of the baby.** It may seem surprising, but labouring women are so caught up in the labour that they do not think much about their baby. It may help to remember why she is going through all this.

WHAT ABOUT PAIN MEDICATIONS? Do you call for them or not?

It depends on:

- Her prior wishes. Did she want an unmedicated birth? How strongly did she feel about it?
- How rapidly she is progressing and how far she still has to go.
- How well she responds to more active coaching.
- Whether she is asking for medications.

These factors help you decide what to do. It is sometimes difficult to balance present wishes against prior wishes. Try to stick with what you wanted before labour regarding medication use. But if in labour she insists on changing from a plan of not using them, respect her wishes.

Numerous women have said, "I never could have done it without my partner. If it hadn't been for him (or her), I would have given up." By being there and using these factors you can indeed get your partner through those desperate moments when she feels she cannot go on.

Adapted from *Penny Simkin's Take Charge Routine*, 1987.

Approved by:
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