

## Things to consider when writing a birth plan

Birth plans/preferences/wishlists. Whatever you call them, some people love them, and some hate them. I'm of the opinion that their value is in the research more than the writing.

Birth will not always go to plan. There is almost always one thing in every birth that is unexpected. If writing your plan down means you're going to lose your flexibility, don't write it down. Just know your preferences, and make sure your support people know them inside out too. Communicate them verbally as regularly as possible with your care providers during pregnancy and labour.

A lot of pregnant people say 'I'll just go with the 'flow''. Who's flow? "My own." Well, if you've not at least thought about your flow, then you're going to flow to someone else's. Someone else's 'flow' is probably going to be very different to what you'd have chosen for yourself. The phrases 'fail to prepare, then prepare to fail' and also 'if you don't know your options, you don't have any' both springs to mind when I hear this sentiment from pregnant people. Someone who is educated and prepared (in any setting) is an empowered person. Every person should be empowered.

Your written plan should be one page - and visual where possible. Depending on the circumstances at the time, your medical professionals will not have time to sit down and read a full two-page (or longer) document. Visual and/or tick box type plans with simple headings are quicker to read and thus more likely to be followed.

Write two plans; one for normal vaginal birth and one for a caesarean. You can do everything in your power to avoid a caesarean, but sometimes they are genuinely necessary. You're going to want to think about the things that you can still control about this process (eg keeping your arms free, having the drape dropped or a clear one so you can watch the birth, delayed cord clamping should still be done in most circumstances etc).

Wording: Use beneficial positive rather than non-beneficial negative language. For example:

- Positive language: "we would appreciate if...", "we would like/love to...", "we desire to...", "you can support us in our goals best if you..."
- Negative language: "we don't want...", "under no circumstances will we...", "please don't..."

Think about what comforts you when you're tired, challenged and in pain. Do you prefer physical contact, encouraging words, a tough love type approach etc. Does a long warm bath relax you, or listening to calming music (or heavy metal, whatever works!)

Share your birth plan/s with your care provider well before you go into labour. They need to know your preferences ahead of time. Schedule a longer meeting during your third trimester, and be prepared to discuss and negotiate certain aspects, especially if they're well outside usual provider/hospital policy. A red flag is a provider who does not want to see or discuss your plan at all.

If you would like further guidance in considering/writing your birth plan, I am available for a small fee. Please see the Services page of my website for further details.