

Being there for the birth is a huge part of being a father and partner. But you can be more than just a presence in the room, you can play a big role in the delivery.

### How Can I Support Her?

This is your biggest job during labor and delivery - support her needs and wants. You need to prepare for this and the start of preparing is talking to the mother. Focus on supporting her by learning what she wants, knowing what to expect, and avoiding the Oops moments.

- Ask, "If this happens, can I support you like this, or would you rather have me do something else?"
  - LISTEN to and REMEMBER her answers!
  - She may change her mind, and that's okay. Be flexible.
- Keep learning. Consider:
  - Taking a childbirth class together
  - Researching by reading about labor and delivery either in a book or on the internet.
  - Checking out other informational lessons like this one.

Decide now that you will also support her by avoiding Oops moments like:

- Focusing more on your phone than on her.
- Eating or drinking in front of her if she can't.
- Telling her what to do.
- Disappearing.
- Discounting her pain OR freaking out about it.

### What's My Role?

To determine your role, some specific things that you can talk through with her include:

- Transportation to the hospital. What if you are at work?
- Who communicates with friends and family throughout labor or after the delivery?
- Who is allowed in the room during labor? Are you the enforcer?
- Is there a vehicle a safety seat needs to be installed in?
- What to pack, including what documents you will need for the hospital.
- Where to keep the "go" bag and what vehicles you will be using.
- How you will be getting time off and how to plan for that.
- How do you want the birth announced after baby comes home?

You can also design the birth plan together. This is a specific plan for the birth with decisions you made ahead of time.<sup>5</sup> Examples are:

1. Medical pain relief vs natural comfort measures, which does she want?
2. How she wants to labor – positions, in a tub or shower, walking, swaying. You'll help with this.
3. Does she want the baby continuously monitored?
4. How does she feel about interventions to move labor along?
5. Does she want a mirror to watch the delivery?
6. Who cuts the cord?
7. Does she want to nurse or bottle-feed the baby in the hospital?

### On the Big Day<sup>2,3,4</sup>

Baby decides when mom will go into labor. Contractions start off mild and irregular, but should become consistent. She will labor at home in the beginning but will need to call her provider to let them know. They will tell you when it's time to go to the hospital or birth center. You can help her time the contractions while laboring at home.<sup>1</sup>

Generally, you'll leave for the hospital when her contractions are five minutes apart, last about one minute long, and are in this pattern for one hour<sup>2,3</sup>, or when your provider says to go. If her water breaks, or she's feeling back pressure or leg cramps, then go to the hospital.

At the hospital:

1. Help her get checked in and paperwork completed.
2. Once in the room, set up her comfort items and get her any food or drink she's allowed and wants.
3. You may also be the gatekeeper and runner and part of communicating with people may be saying "no" to visitors.
4. Communicate with hospital staff, get answers for her, and be present when doctors or nurses visit. She may need your help to remember details.

She also may need to make decisions. Help her ask questions, understand options, and remember her birth plan. Learn the BRAIN method for decision-making. Help her identify the Benefits, Risks, and Alternatives involved in the interventions, and what her Intuition tells her. Discuss what happens if she does Nothing (right then).

[The nurses will tell you when it's time for her to start pushing.](#)<sup>6</sup> You can help guide her on when to push, hold her hand, help her change positions, or whatever else she needs. Make sure to help her with her comfort measures.

**\*\*A Reminder about Privacy:** She is going to be completely exposed during delivery. Respect her privacy wishes with things like photography and you watching the birth. Know if she wants you to cut the cord. She gets to hold baby first if possible, but you should be second.

## How Can I Cope with the Tough Stuff?

A lot of guys don't do well with emotions. But this is an emotional time. Life-changing events put stress on relationships. You need healthy ways to deal with it. Talk about it with her or someone you trust. Let others support you. And take care of yourself— get plenty of rest and try to get some exercise and relaxation. Give yourself some slack and do your best.

Remember:

- You will see her in pain and it may be hard for you. Remember that it hurts for a reason – it's a productive kind of pain, and it stops once the baby is born.
- [Labor lasts from hours to days, and delivery from minutes to hours.](#) You will both get tired. Rest with her between contractions and let others help. And remember to stay hydrated and nourished.
- Delivery is messy, and you may see blood, secretions, the placenta, and maybe even some tearing or a surgical cut. Your baby may look a little odd. That is normal.
- She may say things that feel unfair. It's hard but remember it's coming from the pain and emotions. You may feel the urge to say something back. Don't! Stay positive and with her. This is when she needs you most. You can take it.

Resources:

1. "Last Minute Activities before Delivery." [HealthyChildren.org](http://HealthyChildren.org), [www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/prenatal/Pages/Last-Minute-Activities.aspx](http://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/prenatal/Pages/Last-Minute-Activities.aspx). Accessed 15 July 2021.
2. "Labor Contractions | Sutter Health." [www.sutterhealth.org](http://www.sutterhealth.org), [www.sutterhealth.org/health/labor-delivery/labor-contractions](http://www.sutterhealth.org/health/labor-delivery/labor-contractions).
3. "Labor Day: What to Expect." [www.lamaze.org](http://www.lamaze.org), [www.lamaze.org/stages-of-labor](http://www.lamaze.org/stages-of-labor).
4. "How to Tell When Labor Begins." [www.acog.org](http://www.acog.org), [www.acog.org/womens-health/faqs/how-to-tell-when-labor-begins?](http://www.acog.org/womens-health/faqs/how-to-tell-when-labor-begins?). Accessed 15 July 2021.
5. "Birth Plans." [Hopkinsallchildrens.org](http://Hopkinsallchildrens.org), 2021, [www.hopkinsallchildrens.org/Patients-Families/Health-Library/HealthDocNew/Birth-Plans](http://www.hopkinsallchildrens.org/Patients-Families/Health-Library/HealthDocNew/Birth-Plans). Accessed 15 July 2021.
6. "Second Stage of Labor: Pushing Your Baby Out." *Journal of Midwifery & Women's Health*, vol. 57, no. 1, 29 Dec. 2011, pp. 107–108, 10.1111/j.1542-2011.2011.00145.x.