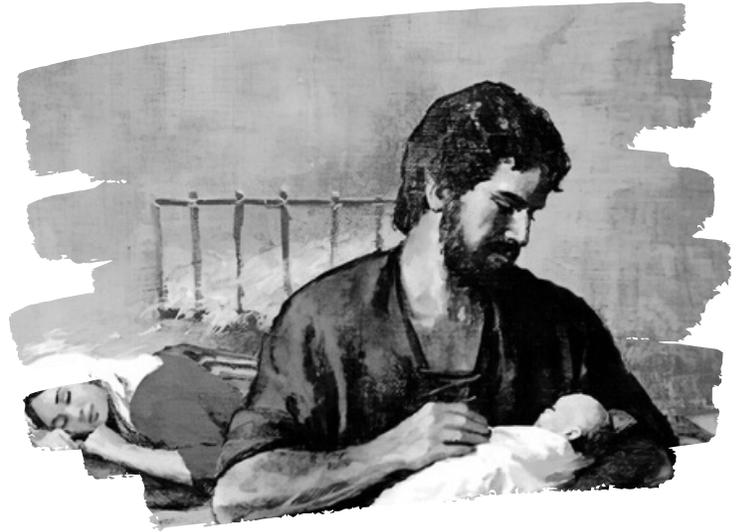


How to Support Your Wife in Pregnancy and Birth

"In this mutual influence which will be revealed to the outside world following the birth of the child, the father does not have a direct part to play. But he should be responsibly committed to providing attention and support throughout the pregnancy and, if possible, at the moment of birth." St. John Paul II (Letter to Families, 16)

One of the most beautiful things in the birth room is to witness a father have an involved role in the birth of his baby. To the extent that the mother is comfortable, of course, it's amazing to witness a man claim his fatherhood and honor the work of his wife in an intentional and hands-on way. It's a powerful witness to the sacrament of marriage and his love for his wife to have a husband involved in birth!

There is no one-size-fits-all when talking about how to support your wife and baby during birth. Be ready to love your wife in whatever way she needs, supporting her during birth in a way that best fits you both. Supporting and loving her well through this intimate time as she works incredibly hard to bring your baby into the world is vital to the wellbeing of your marriage. Here are a few ways dads can offer attention and support before and during birth:



1. Prayer

Your prayers over your wife and unborn baby are incredibly powerful. As your child grows in your wife's womb, you can develop a relationship with that baby. You can pray over her in your own words or with pre-written prayers. You can initiate novenas, a daily prayer for the health and birth of the baby, the Rosary, or any number of ways to draw from God's grace. You can use holy water each day to bless them both. If a priest or deacon is not available, you can even perform the official rite of blessing of a mother before birth and/or the blessing of a child in the womb. One very powerful way you can spiritually support your wife is through some sort of fasting. How powerful it is when a husband makes the choice to enter into the trial that pregnancy and birth can be for his wife and unite with her spiritually through his own self-denial.

During the birth you can pray with and over your wife and baby. Whether it's spontaneous prayer, praying words of Scripture over her, a memorized prayer like the Rosary or a Divine Mercy Chaplet, a litany of saints, or simple words of prayer whispered in the quiet of your heart, those prayers have authority and strength like no other.

2. Physical Support

During pregnancy and birth your physical support can be a huge help! In pregnancy, you can take over chores that she can no longer do, help with nesting, offer massages, foot rubs, and making healthy (or not so healthy ;) meals, or send her to nap while you take over with older kids. During birth providing counter pressure on her back or doing strong hip squeezes can be really helpful. She may need you to take her weight and hold her while she sways through a contraction. You're especially helpful for those because you often have more physical strength than the doula or midwife! You can also offer simple head rubs or a massage during labor. For some men that want to be very involved, sometimes their physical support means they want to catch the baby or cut the cord.

3. Behind the Scenes

Very often fathers are really good at "behind the scenes" labor and birth support. They're the designated "tub guy", are making sure the gas tank is full, or are doing last minute tasks like arranging childcare or taking care of getting bags into the car. For many women, those things are just as important to feeling safe and supported during birth as any others! If needed, get a "labor list" from your wife. Ask her BEFOREHAND (not during!) what she would like taken care of behind the scenes when she is in labor. They may sound small now but knowing those little things are being taken care of means she doesn't have to worry about it and can enter into the work of labor without distraction.

4. Comfort Measures

A husband is usually the one in the birth room who knows his wife best. Talk with her beforehand about how she thinks she will be most supported and comforted during the birth, no matter what kind of birth it is. You know her likes and dislikes, her pet peeves, what makes her afraid, and what makes her feel safe and loved. You can make sure the lights are dim or off or that certain music is playing if she wants that. You can help make sure she has her favorite warm socks or favorite essential oil going or help keep the nurse's chatting to a minimum. As mentioned before, you can be doing hip squeezes or letting her hang from you and sway during surges. Make sure she's drinking a lot of water or juice, help draw the bath or get her in the shower, or fix/order a delicious meal afterward. While obviously preferences and wishes can change during labor and birth, a husband can avail himself and seek to serve his wife and baby in ways little or big as that baby is born.

5. Encouragement and Empowerment

One of the most important and powerful ways you can help in the birth room is through verbal encouragement and a confident presence. You need to believe she can do it and share that confidence with her. Your voice is incredibly important to her. If you believe she can do this, then she is much more able to believe it herself, especially when things get very difficult, the fears rise, and the doubt is strong. You can be a powerful strength for her to draw from, voicing how beautiful she is, how strong she is, and what a great job she is doing. When she might reach a point in labor that almost every woman experiences of "I can't do this anymore" you can be the one encouraging her and speaking truth to her heart that you believe in her strength and that "yes, you can and you are doing it."

6. Advocating

A father's voice is especially poignant when it comes to advocating for birth plan choices and care for your baby. Your natural role as husband and father is to protect your wife and baby especially when they are most vulnerable. A woman in labor should never have to worry about fighting for her rights or advocating for her desires for birth to be respected. You can and should protect your wife and baby by knowing the birth plans, advocating for her, and making sure her wishes are respected. If a nurse isn't working well or a doctor is not respecting something that was previously agreed upon, you can be the one to approach the nurse's station and request a new nurse or be assertive with the provider. While a doula can help remind you of what plans were and empower you to know your rights and talk through decisions, she can not speak for you. A father's voice and authority is powerful in the birth room.

7. Learning and Supporting Decisions

Learn what your wife dreams of for her birth. Trust that both her body and mind are amazingly powerful, intelligent, and intuitive. Read the books she's asking you to, listen to the podcast she sends you, watch the documentary, go to the birth class or interview she sets up.

If you want to have a say in the decisions surrounding your wife's birth then you need to be willing to learn about it. It's not loving or fair to her to want to make decisions that primarily affect her birth, her long term health, her body, and one of the most important experiences of her life but then brush off actually learning about the topics. It's not fair or manly to put that foot down on a decision you won't take the time to research.

You love her and you love your baby and you want them safe. So take the time to explore what safe means. Look into the statistics of your local hospital, birth center, home birth, that OB or midwife and compare who or where is actually having better outcomes. Take the time to find out what places and providers "are" actually safer. Take the time to learn about the interventions that might be offered and what the risks are to them. Be ready to defend her honor, her choices, her health, her body in pregnancy, birth, and postpartum.

Dad, a pregnancy, birth, and postpartum where she feels your strength and love through your reverence, your confidence in her, and through your physical and emotional presence and support will give you a healthier, happier birth, wife, baby, and postpartum. It'll pay off for ALL of you. Promise!