

## The Birth Pause: Unhurrying The Moment Of Meeting

The birth pause, very simply, is a slowing of the moment when a mother and baby first meet. This can occur in many ways, but we are loving what happens when a midwife or doctor simply guides the baby down where he is born, allowing the mother the extraordinary moment of discovery where she can really see and explore her baby before she gathers her just-born child into her arms.

### The Birth Pause

If a 'pregnant pause' is a breath held in a story, a moment's stillness where we linger between what has been told and what is yet to be told, then what we are calling a 'birth pause' might be thought of as a breath at the moment of birth: a place to linger, suspended briefly between what has just happened – the mighty work of birth, and what is to come - the unfolding of the new human life that has been placed in your care. When you pause at birth you are in a sense stopping to catch the moment of arrival, yours as much as your baby's.

What is this "birth pause?" you ask your midwife.



A baby is guided down at birth

Well, practically speaking, instead of delivering your baby directly to your chest, she will simply guide your baby down where he is born. He will land gently on soft pads in a warm pool of amniotic fluid. He will stretch out his arms and expand his lungs for those first sweet gulps of air. You will likely take a breath yourself and gather yourself together after the huge effort of birth. You will then probably turn your full attention to this newly-born child lying in front of you. You will be the one to welcome your child as you touch his hands, arms, legs, belly. When you are ready, you will be the one to wrap your hands around his torso and bring him up to your chest. The moment of birth itself will be held by this pause, a pause in which you and your child first find each other on the other side of birth.

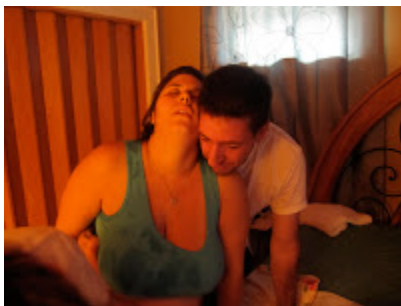


A mother sees and touches her baby for the first time



The first touch

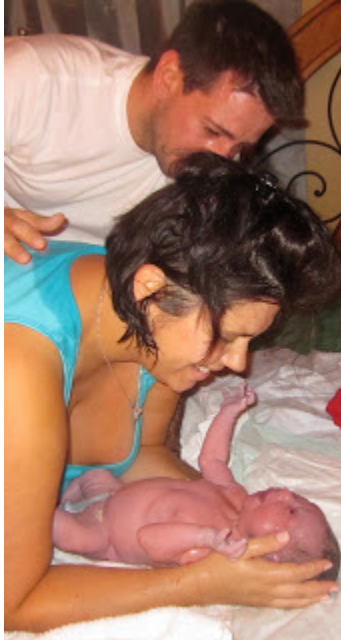
Perhaps it makes sense to you that you will be able to see your baby much more clearly at the moment of birth if he is below you than if he is delivered straight to your chest. But won't you be sort of overwhelmed at the moment of birth for all this looking and studying, you wonder? Maybe you'll need a moment to collect yourself?



A mother who has just birthed her baby takes a moment

Very true. You may need just such a moment. And that is one of the beauties of a baby guided down at birth. When a baby is birthed down, and no one hurries your baby onto your chest, you will very naturally have your moment for the stunned relief of delivering your baby. This part of the birth process

will be accorded its own respect. A woman will exhale from the work of birth before she begins to inhale the presence of her child and her new identity as a mother.



Now ready, they turn their full attention to the extraordinary moment in which they meet their baby

Indeed, your midwife knows that when a baby is delivered directly to a woman's chest, many women are in fact somewhat overwhelmed when they finish the work of birth and attempt to take in their baby in the very same moment. As a witness to the birth process and perhaps a mother herself, your midwife knows that the words and phrases that describe many mothers' very first moment after giving birth include a stunned kind of relief, bewilderment, and shock. Of course you are eager to see your baby at long last, but you are still very right brain. The tears your midwife most often sees at the time of birth are the father's. You are not there yet. But then, like a cruise ship changing course, coming now into port, your attention shifts. There is a coming back, a return, a shifting of focus to this new child who is also experiencing his own coming into port. This changing of course will happen at more of a clip for some women than for others. But it is with this turn of attention that the high begins to swell, and it will continue to swell over hours and days, weeks and months, parenting effort after parenting effort, until one day it is the tidal wave of love that you have for your child.



Meeting their daughter just after she is born



Meeting their son moments after he is born



Seeing her daughter for the first time

When a baby is delivered immediately onto a woman's chest there will be plenty of time to study your child's face and body, absorb his presence and digest your new state of being in the hours and days to come. But perhaps with a simple shift in business as usual, we can pause at the moment of birth ... slow

this first trip that your baby makes to your body ... and allow what midwife Karen Strange calls the “natural sequence of birth” to unfold.



Picking up her daughter for the first time



Picking up her daughter for the first time

Karen describes the sequence of birth as a sort of blueprint for what happens when we do not disturb birth. She speaks of it as one of Connection—mother and baby connected in pregnancy; Rupture—the moment of separation at birth; Rest—the pause as the baby lies before its mother, the mother seeing and touching her baby for the first time; and Repair—the trip the baby makes to the breast, thus completing the sequence of birth. Karen says, “We all carry this blueprint within us. When we follow it, it turns on the brain in a certain way. It is amazing!”

With the Rest, or ‘pause,’ there is no rush to get the baby onto your chest. “This pause,” says Karen Strange, “allows the mother to integrate this moment of transition”. You sigh with the completion of your labor and turn your now-ready attention to the next deliberate moment, the moment in which you discover your baby. With your baby below you, not yet on your chest, you can really see your child. You study him. You touch him and then finally gather him in your arms.



A baby crawls to the breast

When this sequence is uninterrupted, neither is there a rush to get the baby to latch on the part of eager helpers. There is a tender, gentle time as you rest from your own hard work of birth where your baby, when ready, begins his search, as all mammals will do, for the breast. You help him as needed, but give him the time and opportunity to exercise this age-old, instinct-driven ability to find your breast. In fact, your midwife has seen how beneficial it is for a baby to be allowed to take the lead in breastfeeding in the special hours after birth (and beyond!), something that is dramatically shifting many parents' experience of breastfeeding.



A cuddle completes the sequence

But just as your midwife is now appreciating what occurs when we respect a baby's ability to find its mother at birth, she and others are learning a respect for and understanding of our own abilities as women to find our babies at birth. When we do not rush through the moment of birth, but honor the pause that marks the center of this sequence, what happens seems to be nothing less than a paradigm shift of equal significance. For you are not only finding your baby, you are finding yourself as a mother, finding your way into a new state of being.

For more on this, see "Waiting to Inhale: How to Unhurry the Moment of Birth," *Journal of Perinatal*

Education.

Mary Esther Malloy