



PROCESSING YOUR BIRTH STORY

A GUIDE

Birth is an intense experience. For some, birth can be empowering and connecting. For others it can be scary, overwhelming, or even traumatic. Regardless of how you feel about your birth, it can be important to process and integrate your experience.

Read the following questions and then close your eyes and recall your birth.

What is the first image that comes to mind?
Why does this image feel significant?
What do you see?
What do you hear?
Do you remember any scents? Tastes?
Who is with you in this image?
Is there a word that comes to mind?
What emotions do you notice?
What thoughts come to mind?

Get a journal, open a word document, or find a voice recorder on your phone or computer.

Start from the beginning and begin to recall your birth story as you remember it beginning with the early signs of labor.

Sometimes it is helpful to talk to your doctor or midwife.

Is there someone in your inner circle who can support you in this process?

RECALLING EVENTS

Questions for partner who gave birth:

Early labor: were you ready? what time of day was it? where were you?

Active labor: what did it feel like? who was with you? what emotions did you feel as labor progressed? were there any notable events?

Birth: what events took place right before your baby was born? did you feel prepared for these events? who was there and how did you feel about their presence?

Postbirth: what happened right after your baby was born? what did you feel when your baby was born? what did those first moments together look like?

Questions for birth support partner:

Early labor: were you ready? what time of day was it? where were you?

Active labor: what role did you have? what emotions did you feel as you watched your partner? who was with you? any notable events?

Birth: what events took place right before your baby was born? did you feel prepared for these events? where were you when your baby was born, and what were you doing?

Postbirth: what happened right after your baby was born? what did you feel when your baby was born? what did those first moments together look like?

Some new parents can experience different stages of grief following their child's birth.

- 1) **Denial** - "Did this really happen to me/us?" "It doesn't matter, I'll be fine."
- 2) **Anger** - "Who's fault is this?" "I /we didn't deserve this." "Nobody understands."
- 3) **Bargaining** - "If I can control my baby's schedule it'll make up for having no control over my birth." "If we have another baby it'll make it better."
- 4) **Anxiety** - "Something bad is going to happen," "I/we are not safe," tunnel vision, hypervigilance or hyperarousal, difficult sleeping, re-experiencing, worrying.
- 4) **Depression** - "I'll never get over this." "My body failed me." "I failed my partner." "I'm a bad mother/father." "I failed my first job as a parent."
- 5) **Acceptance** - "I can't ignore the painful emotions and memories anymore, I deserve to get help and feel better." "I am a good parent." "I can do something about my experience (e.g., get help, share my story to educate and support others)."

*adapted from Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross' 5 stages of grief + Claire Bidwell Smith's book "Anxiety: The Missing Stage of Grief."

Resources

Approximately 1 in 3 birth parents describe their birth as traumatic, and almost 1 in 10 percent of birth parents develop post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of their birth experiences. Partners are also at risk. To find professional support, you can visit some of the resources listed below:

Postpartum Support International <https://www.postpartum.net/>

- Offers a helpline, a directory of local resources, and information regarding birth trauma, PTSD, and treatments

Prevention and Treatment of Traumatic Childbirth PATTch pattch.org

- An organization of psychotherapists, childbirth educators, doulas, researchers, and academics who are dedicated to bringing together like-minded individuals to educate childbearing women and families and maternity care professionals on the impact of birth trauma. They offer trainings and resources.

PsychologyToday.com

- A directory that allows you to find therapists, psychiatrists, and programs in your area with options to find clinicians based on their approach, speciality, and payment options like insurance.

Open Path Collective <https://openpathcollective.org/>

- A directory where you can find therapists who offer low fee counseling (between \$30-\$60).