

## VBAC: Preparing Mothers to Labor

VBAC moms require a unique approach to labor that goes beyond the statistics and to the heart of the woman who is pursuing it.

Because VBAC is thought of and managed as a high risk endeavor these mothers need additional tools and education at their disposal to successfully engage with their families, birth team, inner self, and labor. Often times VBAC mothers feel apprehension and anxiety in the hospital setting, while simultaneously feeling that the hospital provides a safe environment in the case of uterine rupture, however small the the chance.

Many VBAC mothers reflect upon their births with frustration and sometimes disappointment. Some may feel betrayed or mistreated. Some mothers may feel a sense of loss or failure while others may feel as if they have been violated. The range of emotions is wide. It may also be that women may not experience any of these emotions until later, when they gain some additional insight or become more educated about the birth process. The new information prompts them to critically evaluate their own birth. Other mothers may feel that the cesarean was life saving and now harbor many feelings of inadequacy or simply fear, while for some it was the urgency of the cesarean that was traumatic.

These intense feelings typically translate into one form or another of apprehensive feelings towards obstetrics, the medical approach to birth or simply the hospital setting. In response women seeking out VBAC are typically looking for low intervention approaches to birth. Many would choose, and some do, to birth outside of the hospital; however, the fear of uterine rupture persuades many to birth in the hospital setting. The very place that offers medical safety is also the place that holds many intense feelings for them.

In pursuit of birth VBAC moms must over come stigma, tradition, rejection and fear. How can we equip these women to do so successfully?

1). **Take a real birth class.** Take a class that will teach a mother the skills she needs to handle labor. A class that will prepare a solid and engaged support person- one who intimately understands the mother and what she brings with her. She will feel ready to make choices and know techniques to handle labor effectively raising her confidence level and shifting the balance of power and control towards her. Working with her support person in advance will ease anxiety and enhance her confidence.

2). **Write the birth story.** VBAC mothers should spend time carefully reflecting on their previous birth/s. Understanding why decisions were made and reflecting on how different choices or actions may have resulted in a different outcomes. Another important step is for the mother to also write down the joyous parts of that birth. As she works through her story she may find memories that are painful to her- moments when she felt helpless, unheard, lack of privacy or respect, disconnected from baby, resentful, angry at spouse or other people present at the birth. Acknowledging her feelings and identifying those moments where the birth was beautiful to her can allow mothers to process the experience in a positive way.

In this writing exercise:

- She must forgive
- Assign the joy- let no person steal the joy of that birth
- Decide to remember the birth joyfully
- Evaluate and identify places that could change the outcome

- Identify those components of the previous birth that will be important to her in the next birth experience
- Create choice and solutions in anticipation for specific issues
- Share her story

3). **Connecting with other VBAC moms.** To listen and hear another woman's VBAC story is a powerful experience. Mothers feel strengthened and empowered to know that they are not alone and that others have chosen a similar path. This knowledge helps to validate the VBAC mother's pursuit of VBAC and challenges the stigma that VBAC is a rogue and reckless.

4). **Research Quick Reference.** Creating a folder with the top five most relevant research articles pertaining to VBAC and other relevant topics that apply to the mother's circumstance. She should read this and take it with her to appointments. This allows mothers to ask questions and to bring conversations back to the research.

5). **Change to a positive filter.** Reading, listening and watching positive birth stories can help to change mother's expectations of birth. Do not allow others or the media to continue projecting negative birth ideas onto the mother. This may include family members or others in her peer group. The mother should also change her own language when talking about birth. Th

6). **Safe.** Mothers must feel safe in order to birth their baby. Though the hospital setting may heighten the mother's anxiety, it may also be the place where she feels safe, or perhaps her partner feels that mother and baby are safer in that setting. Mothers may be made to feel safe by having their spouse, mother, doula or other individuals who know her well present at a prenatal appointment as well as the birth. Creating a home like environment can facilitate relaxation for the mother.

7). **Accepting Risk.** VBAC mothers will need time to evaluate the risks. Mothers must come to terms with those risks and prepare for both positive and negative outcomes. To pursue VBAC without doing so would be irresponsible. In preparation for birth all mothers can benefit from taking the time to evaluate all of the potential birth outcomes prior to labor.

8). **She must persevere.** The unique quality of a VBAC mother is perseverance. VBAC is safe for many women, and yet is a road filled with obstacles from VBAC hospital bans, unsuccessful in finding a supportive birth team, and cultural influences. A woman pursuing VBAC may be told "No", rejected, discouraged, labeled "reckless" or balked at by physicians, peers, hospital administrators, and law makers. Each time she is told "No" she will need to regroup. Each time the mother must reaffirm her position, and reconnect to her purpose or goal. This is the reality of many mothers pursuing VBAC- though not all. The climate for VBAC is changing slowly.

9). **Support.** Mothers need to know that their partner supports their choice to VBAC. They feel more confident knowing that their partner is on their team and will support them on this journey. Having a partner that is confident, well trained in labor support and ready to listen to the mother will give the mother a valuable peace. She will be able to enter her labor knowing that her partner will help to advocate for her and will support her.

10). **Relaxation.** All mothers and especially VBAC mothers will benefit from being relaxation experts. By practicing relaxation the mother will be able to allow labor to happen. She will be able to handle various circumstances. Relaxation is a critical tool that will help her to focus during the birth and during other stressful situations!