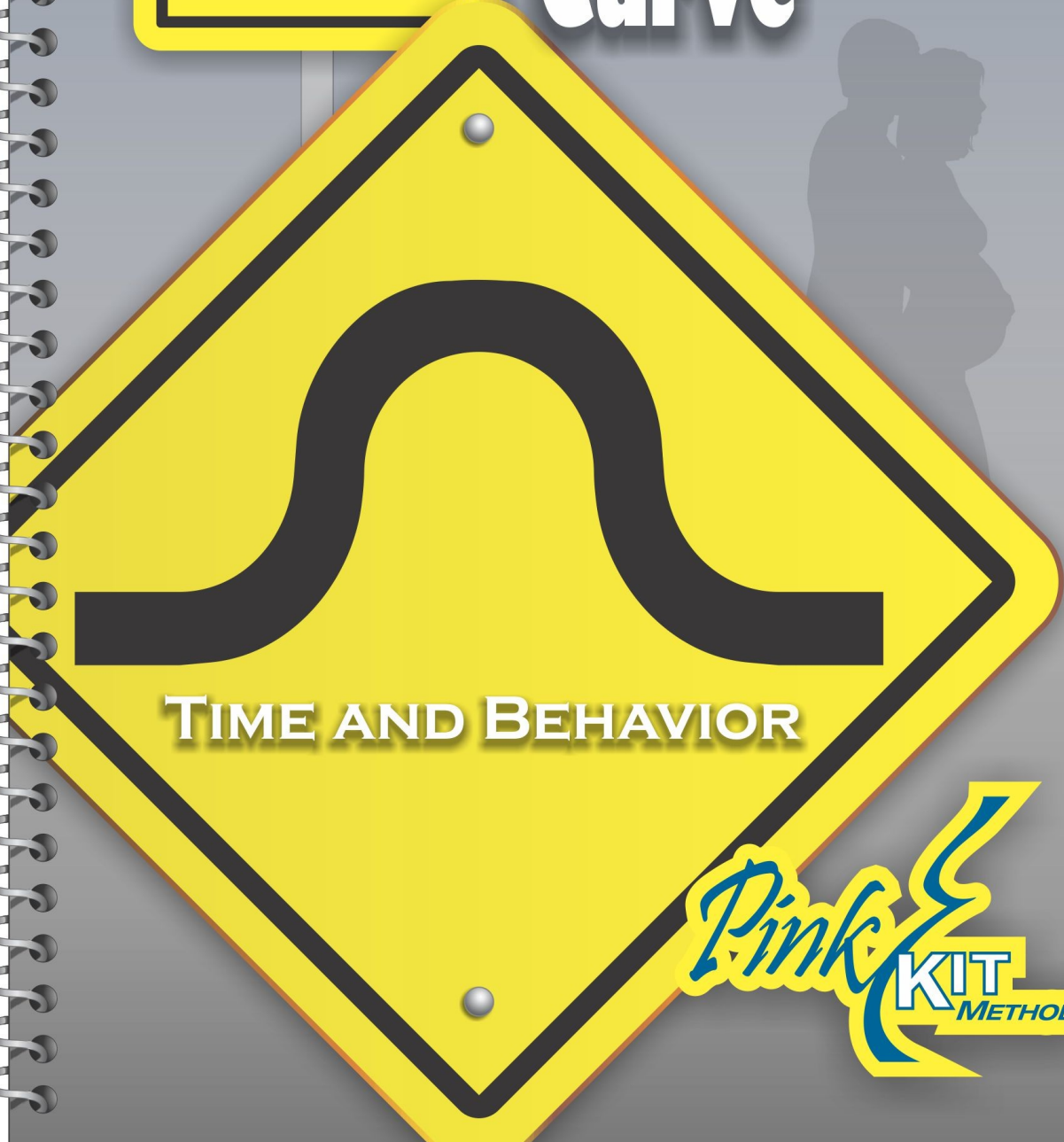


**The**

**PROGRESSION**

**5  
PHASES**

**and the  
Bell-Shaped  
Curve**



**TIME AND BEHAVIOR**

*Pink* **KIT**  
METHOD®

## The 5 Phases and the Bell-Shaped Curve: Time and Behavior

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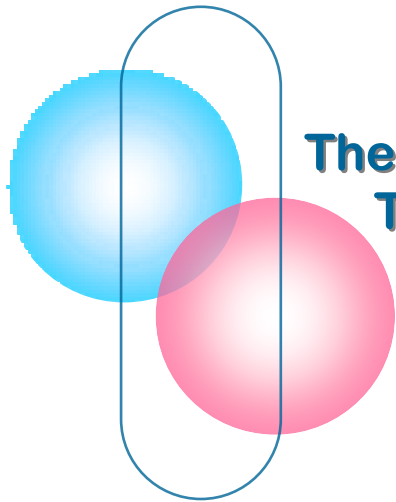
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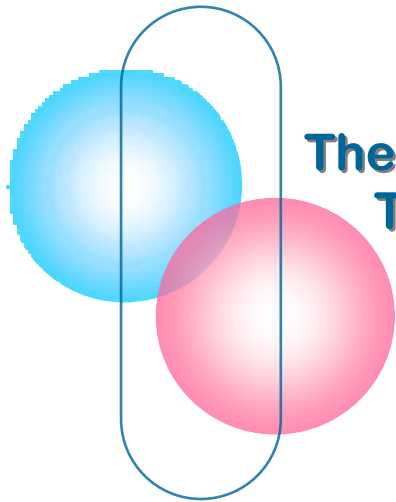


# The 5 Phases and the Bell-Shaped Curve: Time and Behavior

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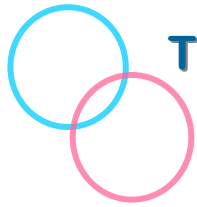


# The 5 Phases and the Bell-Shaped Curve: Time and Behavior

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# The 5 Phases and the Bell-Shaped Curve: Time and Behavior

## The Rhythms of Childbirth

We tend to see childbirth as an event that happens in a single chunk of time, instead of as an activity that we do over time and that has specific rhythms. Not only will you participate in this activity, but you will also have to participate at every moment until it culminates in “the birth.”

In order to accomplish your birth, you will go through a macro-timeframe, an overall rhythm that includes:

- the transitional time from being pregnant to knowing you are in labor
- the dilation of your cervix
- the birth of your baby
- the delivery of the placenta

You will also go through mini-macro-timeframes:

- one contraction that follows another

Although most birth books or classes don't speak about birth as a “timeframe” or “rhythm” (Big Picture) or contractions as small timeframes/rhythms (Small Picture), that is what happens. At the same time, most Birth Stories focus on these two timeframes.

### **Macro-Timeframe, or Big Picture**

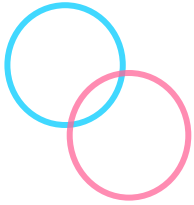
*“Started labor at 6pm. Had the baby at 10am the next morning.”*

*“My labor was short.”*

*“My labor went on and on for days.”*

### **Mini-Macro-Timeframe, or Small Picture**

*“My contractions were bearable.”*



*"I had terrible back labor even between contractions."  
'My contractions came every 20 seconds."*

When the focus is on the Big Picture or even the Small Picture, we actually aren't saying much, nor are you learning much. It's sort of like saying, "I climbed Mt. Everest. The weather sucked and it was hard." For a person wanting to climb Mt. Everest, there must be another, more refined story: what do you do at every single step. Giving birth is your Mt. Everest. You need to know how to move through the Small Picture to get to the Big Picture by what you do at every moment. Whether it's mountain climbing, singing, building a house, or giving birth, it's the "how to" that is important and sorely lacking in childbirth preparation today.

Birthing Better with The Pink Kit Method® wants to introduce you to the timeframe where your work is *really* done: the micro-timeframe, composed of the discrete 5 Phases of every contraction. These 5 Phases are your guide for working through this incredible experience, helping you feel in control, and enabling you to work with your baby's efforts to be born, personally, as a family, and with your birth providers.

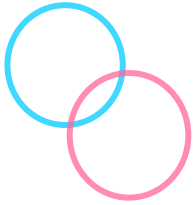
This Birthing Better Pink Kit resource will help both of you to understand

- the rhythm of childbirth as experienced through the macro, mini-macro, and micro timeframes.
- how you will see yourself and others during the timeframes of giving birth.
- how to work within the micro-timeframe of the 5 Phases and shape of each contraction.

### **Three Types of Birth, One Type of Time**

You will give birth one day, and you will have one of these three birth types:

- You will labor, then have a vaginal delivery.
- You will labor and have a surgical delivery.
- You will not labor and have a surgical delivery.



Even if you are planning or end up having a non-laboring Caesarean, you need to fully understand that your body is preparing to labor and have a vaginal birth. There is a similar rhythm on the day you will give birth as for a woman who will labor, so read along. Use your imagination right now to see what skills you can use on the way to the hospital, as you are prepped for surgery, during the short delivery of your baby, and then during the period of recovery that might be filled with common discomforts not unlike labor.

If you are planning a VBAC, or vaginal birth after a Caesarean, you will still end up with one of these three births.

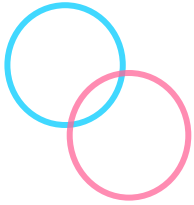
All three types of birth share one fundamental similarity that can never be avoided: they take time. And this resource is all about time, about how we pass our time. This is where “choice” is important.

- Gosh, we just let time pass by.
- Golly, we filled time by doing something.

In reality, we are always doing something, whether we are conscious of that fact or not. The only difference between these two ways of passing time is our choice to be mindful or not.

If you have previous children, you already know that giving birth takes time. You also know that you have little control over the actual occurrence of birth. You also know that giving birth is an activity you have to go through. And you know that you either felt fairly passive, without much control, or you did possess the skills to work through this activity.

If this is going to be your first baby and first exposure to birth, you may have only seen a birth through a “birth video.” This gives an incredibly warped view of childbirth. Birth videos usually show a few contractions and then “the birth,” which is the shortest part of the activity of giving birth. It’s the labor part that is often most painful and takes up the bulk of time.



## **Big Picture rhythm**

Every activity has a start, a progression, often a peak, a winding down, and then a completion. Whether a task at work, a marathon, a birthday party, or a journey in our car, all activities have their own rhythm that includes these phases.

Childbirth, regardless of what type it is, is no different:

- It starts,
- goes along,
- gets more intense,
- peaks in the delivery of your baby and the placenta,
- and it's over.

That's the Big Picture of childbirth. As soon as it's over, you become a parent, but that's a whole other activity.

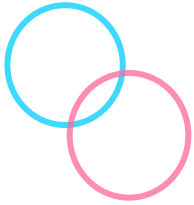
## **Small Picture rhythm**

Remember, the Small Picture is one contraction following another. When contractions start, how quickly they become painful, how long they last, how much space between them, or even how you feel about them is unique to your birth and why your Birthing Better Pink Kit skills are so adaptable to any situation.

There are basically three ways that contractions start:

1. They last from 15-30 seconds, are spaced between 7 and 20 minutes apart, and you are aware they are different from the tightenings (Braxton-Hicks) you've had before. Within an hour or two, they have become stronger, closer together, and stronger. Your water may or may not break.
2. They seem to do #1 but then fade away. They can do this on and off, day or night, over several days
3. They bang into play, are very intense and often close together. In hindsight, you'll remember your uterus tightening up previously, but you ignored it.





Giving birth is all about time. In five minutes, you could have one or two contractions lasting one minute long, accompanied with pretty intense pain, and two or three minutes of rest before the next one comes. And this would happen again in the next five minutes, and the next, and the next and the next over a period of hours until the very short period of “the birth” took place.

If you don't not know how to use every moment of this time (activity) with one or more skills, you will still experience what happens to you, but it will leave you feeling out of control and overwhelmed. One goal of your Pink Kit Package is to teach you how to use your skills to work through this activity that is your baby's efforts to be born, whatever type of birth you have, by using The 5 Phases: each step up that mountain.

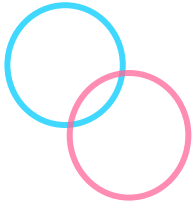
The 5 Phases are the micro-timeframes in which you act, behave, manage, cope, and deal with giving birth as a birthing woman.

### **Women: Self-Observation**

There is a major, inaccurate perception that somehow a woman's mind goes blank during the birth process. It's actually the reverse. Humans talk to themselves all the time, and this doesn't stop during the birthing process. Nevertheless, what a woman says to herself and how she behaves can be very different.

Imagine two women in labor. Both are very quiet, sitting in an armchair with their eyes closed. You can see only small signals of their contractions, but it is impossible for you to claim that nothing is going on in their heads.

Pretend the woman on the left is making moment-to-moment choices inside her head about what skills to use. She might not like the experience, but she is aware of herself coping and managing the pain. This makes her feel good about herself, even if she does not like the pain. What skill to use, when and how to use each one, goes on inside the head, the brain, and the mind and then is directed to the body. But, from the outside, no one knows.



The other woman is just getting through labor because she has no skills to choose from. She's quiet because she's too embarrassed to make a sound and feels totally out of control of the experience.

You will perceive of yourself at every moment of childbirth just as those two women know themselves. Giving birth actually heightens all of your awareness, including how you perceive yourself to be coping, managing, acting, handling, or behaving. Let's make these words a little clearer.

**Act:** do something, take action, take steps, proceed, be active, perform, operate, work, discharge duty, accomplish

**Behave:** act, perform, conduct yourself, work

**Manage:** run, direct, administer, supervise, cope, handle

**Cope:** manage, handle, deal with, survive, hack it, get by, muddle through

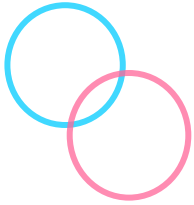
**Handle:** take care of, be responsible for, deal with or cope with something

Throughout your baby's birth, you will be aware of how you feel about your own performance. Giving birth is unlike any other experience and has its own set of rather mysterious laws. While other types of pain rarely produce empowerment, giving birth does—you can act, cope, manage, handle, or behave well because you are using skills and *know* that you are a competent woman in labor.

Unfortunately, most childbirth resources tell you that you don't need to be skilled. "Cats aren't taught to birth; you don't need to be taught." However, cats also don't climb Mt. Everest, and your Mt. Everest will be incredibly enriched by your own use of skills.

## **Birthing: A Personal Metamorphosis**

As you move into your role as mother, every single one of your woman's senses becomes enhanced and heightened. Once you settle into the role, you'll develop superpowers. Mothers have eyes in the back of their head and four arms at least.



They are experts at multi-tasking and organizing a huge amount of information.

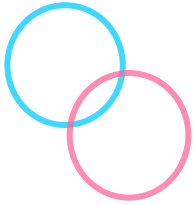
These abilities begin to grow during pregnancy. Curiously, while pregnant, you will probably feel that your mind can't hold onto anything. "The bigger the uterus grows, the more the mind goes." Symbolically, this is the way for you to lose your previous Self and begin to grow your new Self as mother. Birth is characterized by being scary, exciting, very mysterious, and magical. It's as profound as the metamorphosis of a butterfly, transforming you for your new life as a parent—from becoming a mother to being a mother.

Within this timeframe of giving birth, the previous relationship you have had with your baby will profoundly change. Previously, your body's job was to nourish and protect your baby. But as your baby announces more and more strongly its desire to be born, you will increasingly focus on the arrival of the next contraction, how long it lasts, and how painful each one is. Your body's job now is to let your baby out, and your mental job is to work with your baby's efforts to do so.

During childbirth, there is nothing in your life that is as important as giving birth. In a real sense, your baby's efforts to be born capture your full, undivided attention. Time passes, but your time sense alters.

During the early part of labor, when contraction pain is not intense, you will still be aware of everything around you. At the same time, you are living within the 5 Phases. This is the time for you to use your skills to learn about each Phase.

As your cervix dilates, thus increasing the pain, you will be much less attentive to the familiar sense of time passing you by, yet each moment highlights the activity that your baby is stimulating in your body. The growth in internal sensations will decrease your external awareness as you are driven into yourself. This is where the 5 Phases become much more pronounced and your ability to use skills within each Phase heightens. As one woman said, "I could have given birth on the main street square and not noticed anyone or cared."



### **Use your consciousness differently**

At the present, making “choices” via your Birth Plan is the most observable way for you to be “conscious” during pregnancy and toward your coming birth. However, this is not how your Birthing Better with The Pink Kit Method® uses the word “conscious,” or even “choices.” Making your Birth Plan is exercising conscious choices, but there are other meanings to these terms. When it comes down to it, you can’t “plan” your birth, because there is no way to know what it will be like. You can make a Birth Plan about what you want others to do or not do. That’s the present-day thinking about Birth Plans. From a Birthing Better perspective, you should also make a Birth Plan that highlights the skills you and your partner will be using during your baby’s activity of being born.

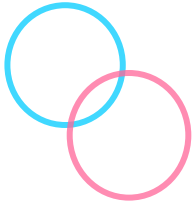
This means that your consciousness expands *beyond* what you want others to do during this Big- and Small-Picture experience to how you will behave and act during the 5 Phases.

Here’s an example from an Oprah show of how the word “consciousness” can be used differently by different people. She and a guest were discussing eating habits. Her guest said that she “ate consciously.” Oprah asked her to define that term. For her guest, it meant being aware of how her food was grown and what was in products. Oprah had an “Ah-ha” moment. To her, being “conscious” about food was to make certain she chewed well and made choices about how much she ate. Same word, but very different interpretations!

So, being conscious during birth from a Birthing Better Pink Kit perspective is to

- be conscious of the 5 Phases of each contraction.
- be conscious of what skills you use during each Phase.

**True consciousness in giving birth comes when your inner self-direction and your outer behaviors are aligned.** When you participate in the rhythm of childbirth through the timeframe of the 5 Phases, you have the ability to do this activity on a moment-to-moment basis in a skillful manner. You can thus see yourself as acting,



behaving, managing, coping, and handling the birth well.

### **Without conscious skills**

Here are some birth stories from women who didn't have skills.

*"Yes, I was disappointed that I had more medical care than I had wanted, but I was much more disappointed with my inability to cope with the pain."*

*"I will never forget how overwhelmed I was giving birth. I didn't want to even look at my daughter, much less hold her. It took me months to bond with her."*

*"Everyone says you forget how painful birth is, but you don't forget that you suffered."*

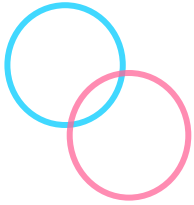
### **With conscious skills**

Here are some from women who were skilled.

*"After the birth, I was so pleased with myself. I hated the experience, but boy I am so proud of how I handled it."*

*"The difference between my second birth and first one was simple: I knew how to relax."*

*"What do I remember of my two births? During my first birth, I was restless, jumping up at each contraction, feeling unsettled, and moaning heaps. My midwives told me I was 'wasting my energy,' so I became a 'good girl' and never made another peep and never moved off the bed. After the birth, everyone praised me for how well I handled the birth! I hated it. At my second birth, I used my Pink Kit breathing skills as my primary focus, which meant the sounds I made sounded to me and everyone around like I was coping, which I was. After the birth, my midwives told me how well I handled the birth! I still hated it, but I wasn't confused about myself. Next birth? I now know how to give birth, and I'm incredibly proud of that. Will I still hate it? Don't care. That's not the goal."*



## **Perception of Yourself**

Birth professionals see thousands of births. Of course, they like to be with women who are coping or managing labor well. But remember the story immediately above. While the birth professionals complimented this woman on her external “behavior,” or how “well” they thought she did, she hated the whole experience. She hated (strong word!) both births, but having skills made a huge difference between seeing herself as a failure and success.

Remember, your birth is not about how others see you. It’s ultimately how you feel about yourself.

On the other hand, there is no doubt that many birth interventions are implemented in response to the external perception that you are “suffering” in childbirth. This means that your behavior is seen and reacted to by others.

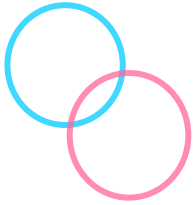
For example, if you are planning a vaginal birth after a Caesarean, and you appear exhausted after hours and hours of contractions, your birth provider will be much more anxious and inclined to encourage you to have another surgical delivery. Likewise, if you are coping well and able to communicate your wellbeing to others, your birth providers will be more relaxed.

But remember, this is not about having a social mask—“No, I’m feeling fine,” or “No, there’s nothing the matter.” It’s about truly coping and managing the activity of labor, which your Birthing Better Pink Kit skills are designed to help you do, through every contraction and every space between, so that you feel good about how you managed this life-transforming experience.

### **Is your opinion of yourself important?**

Does it matter to any individual woman how she perceives of her own behavior?

Yes, it does. If you have given birth, you know that the memory of the process of



giving birth does soften around the edges over time for most women, while others remain traumatized for years. You also know that how you remember your own behavior often sharpens over time, because it carries over into your parenting.

For example, if you feel you gave up or wimped out during birth, it seems easy to give in again when faced with parenting challenges. Conversely, if you met a challenge during birth with a personal victory and faced similar moments as a parent, you recognize your own power to deal with problems.

This is why your Birthing Better Pink Kit skills have a follow-on effect in both your parenting and partnering relationships. While you cannot choose the process or outcome, you can choose your behaviors. Make this your goal.

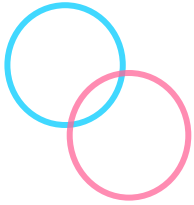
### **The Pink Kit and “perfect”**

Because this resource will teach you how to break down the timeframe of giving birth into 5 Phases, you will be able to apply one or more skills during any Phase. There are some women who are able to use their Birthing Better Pink Kit skills at every single moment, but most just do the best they can do and feel great for that accomplishment. The Pink Kit is not about “perfect” births; it’s about perfectly good births.

*“The Pink Kit was great. Without these skills, I would have totally not even tried and just settled for an epidural at the first discomfort. With these skills, I knew I could handle much more pain than I thought. I had an epidural hours later than I thought I would. Perhaps next time I’ll see if I can go longer.”*

*“When I was pregnant, I was told I had to make choices about my birth. In labor, I realized the truth. I had to choose at every single moment how I breathed in and how I breathed out. I focused on the choices I could make about minuscule behaviors and feel great about my birth experience.”*

*“The Pink Kit was GREAT. During every inhalation at the start of an intense contraction, I*



*could really feel myself expanding inside my pelvis and soften around my pelvis with each exhalation. Then I moaned and groaned for the rest of the contraction. But at the start of each contraction, I felt really in control. It was GREAT and I'll do better next time."*

*"Through all four Pink Kit births, I got better and better about using my skills. In hindsight, I realized that in all four births, there were periods of each when I just spaced out, and these periods of birth were always uncomfortable to experience and remember. I also knew this was a habit I had in life—just space out. In this fifth birth, I reached a pinnacle of personal success. I knew exactly what my baby was doing in his process to come out of my body, and I chose to stay really connected. There was one short period where I started to space out again and immediately felt more pain. I pulled myself back and never did that again. I never surrendered to my negative habit."*

## **Perception of Your Birth Coach**

You will be aware of not only yourself, but also your birth partner, whether you use the term "coach," "support," or "helper." Birth Stories offer helpful insight on how women see their partners during birth. Here are some about dads who didn't know how to effectively help.

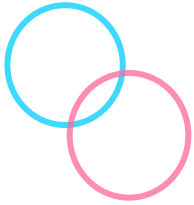
### **How useless can he be?**

*"My husband was useless, really. Our childbirth classes hadn't prepared him to know how to help me, and actually, they didn't help me to help myself. I didn't have a clue how to ask or what to ask for. I wish he hadn't been in the room at all. I could tell he was frightened, but I was doing the work and couldn't be bothered with him, really. What a horrible experience. I was so relieved it was over. It took years for me to recover emotionally and physically. Our relationship suffered tremendously. I didn't trust my husband with our daughter. After all, if he couldn't help me at the birth, why would he know what to do with her?"*

### **Reading is not a choice**

*"My husband tried to help me, but I couldn't stand how he touched me or his breathing. Then he kept trying to talk to me. I just flicked him off, really. This was certainly what I had imagined, but the pain was so intense, and everything he did distracted me. Eventually, he just sat in a chair and read a magazine. That pissed me off more. I've never felt so alone."*





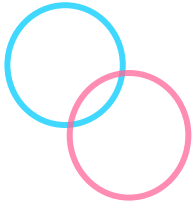
### **No help from him**

*“I wanted a natural birth, and I thought my husband supported me. Labor was so intense. Every contraction just seemed to pound into me. I swore, cursed, and yelled. I refused any pain relief, but my behavior caused the staff to call our doctor, who came and talked to my husband. They agreed I needed something, but I kept shouting at them I didn’t. They waited another few hours, but it just got worse and so did I. Eventually, my husband and doctor decided I did need something to calm down. My doctor said my behavior was harming our baby. They gave me a shot that just knocked me out. I don’t remember much of the rest of the birth, but I stayed angry with my husband. I didn’t trust him.”*

That’s just a few birth stories from women who couldn’t cope and dads who couldn’t help. If barely 1 in 10 women cope well, how can you expect your partner to do better? One goal of your Pink Kit Package is to give you the skills to get on with the birth even if your partner cannot help as you would like. Don’t assume your partner won’t help, though; the most common reason for the inability of fathers-to-be to help is just a fundamental lack of skills.

There are a number of childbirth systems that do focus on the roles of fathers, not just Birthing Better with The Pink Kit Method®. But the Pink Kit is unique, because all other systems focus on achieving a “natural” birth. Your Birthing Better Pink Kit skills will increase your chances of achieving one. However, when this isn’t possible or becomes unlikely, both mothers and fathers often believe there is nothing they can do to have a good birth. This has to do directly with placing “choice” only within the conventional Birth Plans that are only about what you want or don’t want from others. By choosing to use your Birthing Better skills no matter what is happening, you and your partner can always birth better, even if you don’t achieve a natural birth.

Here are some birth stories where fathers helped. These first two stories are common in childbirth and are about fathers “being there,” rather than knowing how to help.



### **He was there for me**

*“I didn’t know what to expect from my husband, but he was great. He always had ice chips ready and a wet cloth to wipe my forehead, and that felt so good. I hung on him for hours, poor lad. His back bothered him for weeks. At the delivery, he held my hand while I pushed and got to cut our baby’s cord.”*

### **I couldn’t have done it without him**

*“For all our births, my husband was my rock. Birth was never something I liked doing, but he was always so calm and reassuring.”*

Here are a few birth stories about how Birthing Better Pink Kit women see their partners. Notice the difference.

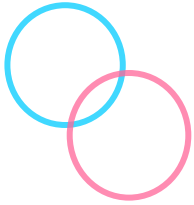
### **I was astounded**

*“When we finally got pregnant again, I had heard about The Pink Kit from a friend who had used it to have a vaginal birth after a Caesarean. She recommended it, and I figured, why not. I went through all the resources on my own, convinced that my husband couldn’t have cared at all. When I went into labor, I just geared up to grit my teeth. What a surprise to find my husband so able to help me! I was so astounded, to say the least. At first, I just kept pushing him away, but he kept making suggestions and helping me use the skills I had learned. I certainly knew more as a second-time mom, but he seemed to know just how to help me, and I couldn’t figure out how.*

*“After a few hours of working together, he told me he had gone through the resources on his own, because he was afraid we’d just get into another argument—something we had done a lot of. It was like getting this great big birthday present. He was fantastic. The wonderful thing is his relationship to both our kids now. He helped me heal, and because I didn’t push him away, this helped him heal as well.”*

### **Praise for husband**

*“Can’t praise my husband enough. We followed the Pink Kit suggestions to see each phase of each contraction as unique as we used our skills. Knowing he was observing and hearing how*



*I responded helped me to hear and see myself. He was so aware and maintained that for hours, when he could have just as easily left me. Yes, he did go to the toilet and eat, but we worked out how to do that so I didn't feel on my own. Thanks to the Pink Kit, he knew my body well and basically worked with both me and our baby to have just an incredible birth experience."*

How do you want to perceive of your birth helper after the birth? Fathers-to-be, other family member, and friends can truly be skilled assets. In fact, watching and listening to how you are coping with each Phase and stepping in immediately to give guidance is their set of learned skills.

### **Perception of Your Birth Provider**

There are also an abundance of Birth Stories of how women scrutinize their birth providers. The time you spend with birth professionals may not be long, but they can have a huge impact on your life.

#### **I didn't have to love my midwife**

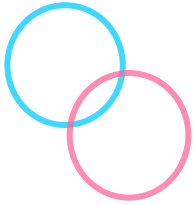
*"Everyone told me that you just love your doctor or midwife during the birth, and I had an obstetrician who I did love. By working with my Pink Kit skills, I realized that I didn't have to love my midwife. I was certainly grateful for her skills and encouragement, but my focus entirely shifted toward myself and using my skills through each phase of every contraction."*

#### **MY birth!**

*"My midwife was everything to me during pregnancy, but I have to say she let me down in labor. She bullied me and seemed tired and distracted. After the birth, she told me she 'had a lot on her plate.' Sorry, but it was MY birth."*

#### **Doing this myself**

*"As a solo mum, I was a bit put off that the Pink Kit always talked about the 'birth coach' as though a woman can't birth on her own. I didn't live anywhere near my family and didn't want any of my friends. I thought I could do this myself. What was interesting during the birth was that I actually taught the staff midwives how to help me."*



So, now you know. You will notice your own behavior, your partner's, and your birth provider's, and often remember what you discern. Your partner will also be aware of himself, see you, and be aware of how the birth professionals see him.

You might not believe this, but he actually has more at stake than you. Since fathers began coming into birth to help and childbirth classes changed from advocating the importance of "coaching skills" to "making choices" and "gathering information," there has been no one guiding men in how to act, what to do, or how to help. This makes men much more vulnerable than they were in the 1960-70s.

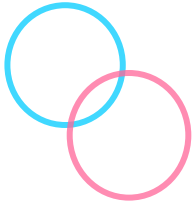
Everyone knows a woman will get through birth one way or another. Even women who moan, groan, freak out, and lose it are complimented afterwards, because everyone acknowledges how hard giving birth is.

For fathers, it's different. People are either scrutinizing his performance or ignoring him, and he is more likely to be judged than sympathized with in the end if he freaks out. Your Pink Kit Package will change all of that. Men can now feel totally confident that they understand the timeframe of childbirth, its rhythm, and what they can do to help you at any moment.

## **Men: Self-Observation**

As a father-to-be, you are now expected to participate in the birth of your baby. The operative word is "participate." This does not mean to stand by or be an observer. Yes, you too have to behave and act well. You have to manage your own energy as you cope with a very new situation and experience.

In your childbirth classes, you might see birth videos in which fathers are often standing around, looking lost while their wife is in pain, and this may be the only image you have of your role. To see your partner in pain is more heart-wrenching than to bear that pain yourself. No wonder men are overwhelmed much of the time at birth. Standing around is not very inspiring and wouldn't be a great memory of yourself when you look back years from now.



While in the section for women, you learned that your partner has a choice about her moment-to-moment behavior as the physical process of giving birth unfolds. You have a different choice, based on a mental decision rather than a physical reality. If you decide to learn your Birthing Better Pink Kit skills, your choice is to really step up and take the role of birth coach as your baby is working to be born.

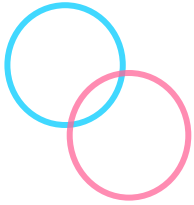
If you do the job properly, you can know one thing for sure: your birth provider will get great joy out of watching the two of you work together, even if there is lots of medical care around the birth. More importantly, if you thoroughly learn how to help your partner do this incredibly challenging activity, she will have an unending amount of respect and love for you. Sure, your birth provider will forget you immediately as another few hundred births roll by them, but what do you care? Your partner won't forget.

### **Coaching: A Personal Metamorphosis**

For first-time fathers, birth coaching is extraordinarily unique for you, as giving birth is to your partner. Your transformation from being an adult man through the phase of becoming a father during pregnancy to being a father of your children is marked by the activity of the birthing process.

Every single sense of yourself as a man becomes enhanced and heightened as you move into your fatherhood role. Men are symbolically ruled by the Heart. Men want to protect, embrace, care for, provide for, and calm. Once you settle into being a father, you develop superpowers just like your partner does. While mothers have eyes in the back of their head, fathers have eyes looking forward and to the side. Fathers are much more likely to be able to calm a child with an innate stillness and acceptance. Fathers love to play. They are experts at solving problems, following through with tasks, and providing an embracing hug.

This ability begins to grow in you during pregnancy and increases during the activity of childbirth. You will have noticed that, during pregnancy, your partner's mind seems like a sieve. This is her period of transforming into her role as mother.



Spend some time looking through National Geographic at fathers in other cultures, and you'll see that this whole period is just as evolutionary for men.

### **Fathers are still left out**

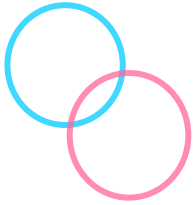
Although you are expected to be involved in the birthing process, you do have the short end of the stick.

Even though men/fathers have been involved with the birth of their children since the early 1970s, the entire focus is still actually on the woman/mother. The family unit is not considered as important as the woman, and you are not taught the skills that permit you to be effective beyond holding her hand, rubbing her back, being hung on, and doing some partner breathing. While there is a high expectation that you are "there," there is little belief that you can be effective.

Some men do find their niche, because that is their personality or they have been at birth before and understand their role is to really help. However, too many men know they have not been as effective in this job as they feel in their work.

Your greatest hesitancy will come when you are around birth professionals. You expect the expert to take over, but helping your partner is NOT their job. Sure, they don't want you to interfere with the assessments, monitoring, and procedures they want to do, but they certainly will never stop you from helping your partner cope, manage, deal with, and work within the 5 Phases. They won't stop you from using your skills. You'll tend to stop yourself, because no one has clearly defined the expectation of your role before. This means you have to resist stepping back when your midwife, doctor, or staff is around.

This is why knowing there are 5 Phases to every contraction will keep you on track to be a great birth coach at every moment when needed.



## Dealing with Red Lights

During the birth, you will be involved in any discussions about the type of healthcare needed. However, when it comes to a final decision about care, your midwife or doctor will not want you to be the final word or your partner's advocate. If your partner is not coping well, they will want to help her and won't believe you can.

This can sometimes be complex. Take this example.

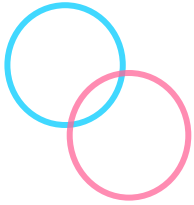
Let's say you and your partner do not want to use pain relief in labor, and you state that in your Birth Plan. Then she decides she wants pain relief. Let's say you remind her about the Birth Plan. She then tells you, "You don't have any idea how painful it is." The staff offers her something, which she accepts. They will not want you to say, "But she didn't want pain relief."

It's not uncommon for men to stop doing anything in cases like that—it feels like a red light, telling them to stop because their partner and birth professionals are going to do whatever they feel like, and "I don't really know what I'm doing anyway." If the woman uses gas with a mask, she will seem more in love with the mask than you. If she uses an injection, she is likely to get sleepy between contractions and feel out of control during them. If she uses an epidural, she is likely to be awake without pain or feel sleepy, and there doesn't seem any reason to continue with the skills.

The truth is, you can and should continue to use your skills, even with pain relief. Just adjust. There are several reasons you want to continue using skills and being involved:

- This is your baby's birthing process and he/she is entitled to your involvement.
- Your partner will be aware if you give up or back off, which she won't appreciate as much as if you stay helpfully involved.

Let's then say that, after the birth, your partner gets angry with you because she didn't want pain relief. This happens all too often. However, you can avoid this



potential red light and the helpless feeling it incurs by establishing a bottom line together with your partner; adding that to your Birth Plan; learning skills so working with the 5 Phases becomes the default behaviors you share; and, when/if pain relief is used, remaining engaged.

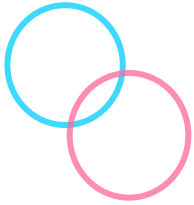
As you work through the 5 Phases with your birthing partner, keep these things in mind:

- Don't think for one moment that your role is less important even though your birthing partner seems to be doing all the work. Don't think your performance, actions, or behavior will go unnoticed—they won't.
- Don't think that your partner will be so wrapped up in her experience that you will slip under her radar—you won't. Women have a remarkable ability to appear to be paying no attention and yet be all-attentive during even the most intense contractions.
- This experience is worthy of your best behavior.

Your baby's birthing process might be intense, full of bodily fluids, and take place in a strange environment surrounded by people you've never met. But this is still *your* experience, a most intimate one. Bring your best. Be your best. Do your best.

When you use the 5 Phases and understand the Bell-Shaped Curve, you will have the framework in which to use your skills. The following part of this resource will show you how to integrate a number of your Birthing Better Pink Kit skills into the 5 Phases of a contraction so that you can help maintain a progressive labor.





## The 5 Phases of Every Contraction

Now is the time to focus on the micro-timeframe of contractions: the 5 Phases. The reasons the Birthing Better Pink Kit skills are so valid for all births is that every woman who labors will have contractions, and **all contractions have the same five parts, distinctive from one another, each providing an opportunity to use skills.**

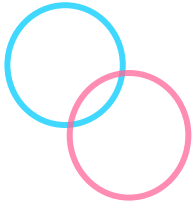
In reality, there is yet a mini-micro timeframe, each inhalation and every exhalation. As one woman said (see [page 11](#)), “I had a choice at every moment—how I inhaled and how I exhaled.” Fortunately, this woman had the Birthing Better Pink Kit skills, so she chose to open her pelvis with each inhalation and soften inside her pelvis with each exhalation. She still rated the pain of contractions to be 13 out of 10, but she knew if she let the pain get the best of her that her inhalations and exhalations would have become stressed. This timeframe is included in the 5 Phases, listed here.

1. Just before the contraction starts and the start—this lasts for a very few seconds.
2. Buildup; pain becomes more intense.
3. Peak; pain is the most intense.
4. Easing off; pain decreases with an attempt to “let go of this one” before the rest period is effective.
5. Rest period between contractions. Usually, the pain is gone entirely, unless you have back labor or other localized pain.

During early labor, when your baby is beginning to open your body, only Phases 1, 4, and 5 may be obvious. If this period is gentle and not painful, thank your baby. Regardless, this is the time to begin to use your Birthing Better Pink Kit skills. It is during these early contractions that you can condition yourself to work with what is happening in your body and get your teamwork going. Together, your job is to begin to open, relax, and soften what is no longer a pregnant body, but a birthing body.

### **Practice leads to skillful adaptation**

Keep in mind that you must practice your skills regularly and with intent. It’s difficult to practice something you’re not able to experience, so different from when



you learned to drive a car. In some ways, you just have to trust that the skills you are learning will work for you when you need them. And they will work, if you've practiced sufficiently and you choose to use them.

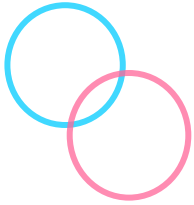
Even though you can't literally practice, use your imagination, or watch a number of birth videos and notice how the women behave. Plan how you can improve on that behavior with the use of your skills.

If you've already gone through labor, you can practice to the memories of your last birth. You want to practice these skills until they are so ingrained into your body and mind that they are your automatic behaviors when labor starts.

Typically, when contractions start, most women experience them as described in #1 on the list above (see [page 4](#)). But even #2 and #3 are normal, and so are dozens of variations. The early, relatively pain-free period can last 7-24 hours, the more painful part 2-7 hours, the very most painful part 30 minutes to 2 hours. Even pushing isn't definite: it can last 5 minutes, or it can last 2 hours or more.

The important thing to remember is that, whether your contractions last for 3 days or 3 hours, whether you are lying in bed hooked up to every machine available or walking outdoors, contractions will always follow the same rhythm: one contraction following another, with a space in between. Each contraction will have 5 Phases, and each contraction will have a number of inhalations and exhalations. You have ample opportunity to use your breathing skills. In every contraction, your body is in some position. This means you can also use some relaxation skill. You and your partner, friend, or other will be together, so you can always use some form of communication (verbal and non-verbal) and some form of touch.

Variations all stay within the same theme of contractions. No woman anywhere in the world has some wave start in her big toe, sweep up her body to her head that opens and a baby pops out. We are not THAT different from each other. The reason you must take time to learn all these skills is so you can adapt them to your particular set of variations.



## Breathing and the 5 Phases

You will now learn how to build breathing skills into the 5 Phases. Each inhalation and exhalation is one breath cycle. While you practice, you will **keep in mind the 5 distinct Phases** until they become second nature.

The below exercises build one on another. It's important that both of you experience every exercise and, when applicable, take turns being the Doer and Receiver. Once both of you feel in your own body what happens as you use your breath in different ways, you are more likely to feel reassured the other person understands you. This opens up communication and enhances the separate, yet equally important, roles as birthing woman and coaching man.

### Exercise #1: Breath Awareness

#### *USE SLACK-JAW EXHALATION*

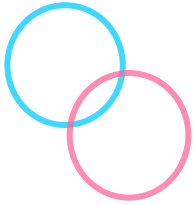
**Phase 1 (beginning):** Breathe in gently through your nose, then gently exhale through your nose. Remember to relax any tense places in your body on your exhalation. Repeat this 2x. This is the time when you set up your breathing pattern for this one contraction.

**Phase 2 (increase):** Breathe more deeply in through your nose, then exhale through your mouth with a slack jaw. Remember to relax your body more fully with each exhalation. Repeat 4x. This will take you up to the peak.

**Phase 3 (peak):** Inhale as deeply as you can through your nose, then exhale through your mouth with a slack jaw, as fully as you can, relaxing even more deeply. Do this 2x. This will take you over the peak of the contraction.

**Phase 4 (decrease):** As the contraction starts to go away, repeat Step 2, doing that breathing 4x. This time you are intentionally calming yourself at each breath cycle. Now take 3 Cleansing Breaths to reduce all your tension.

**Phase 5 (rest):** Go back to breathing in and out of your nose during this space before the next contraction. Scan inside your body, and let go of any remaining tension.



### Take away

1. As each contraction builds through Phases 1, 2, and 3, make each breath cycle deeper while you breathe in your nose, and fully exhale your breath, as your exhalations move from your nose to your mouth. Then, as you move through Phase 4, reverse the order, with your breath gradually becoming less intense, eventually coming back to in-nose/out-nose breathing for Phase 5.
2. When you work with the 5 Phases of each contraction, labor becomes like a dance, flowing through a series of “steps” that repeat themselves, with variations.
3. Pay attention to how you feel when you use a slack jaw to exhale.

### Exercise #2: Counting

#### *USE BLOWING EXHALATION*

**Phase 1 (beginning):** Breathe in gently through your nose, counting to 5, then gently blow out your rounded mouth while counting to 5. Remember to relax anywhere in your body on your exhalation. Repeat this 2x. This is the time when you set up your breathing pattern for this one contraction.

**Phase 2 (increase):** Breathe more deeply with each inhalation through your nose with the count of 5, and use a more concentrated, rounded-mouth, “blowing” exhalation with the count of 5. Remember to relax in your body more fully with each exhalation. Repeat 4x. This will take you up to the peak.

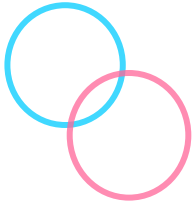
**Phase 3 (peak):** Inhale as deeply as you can through your nose, still counting to 5, then use each exhalation with your rounded mouth blowing to release tension and pain, relaxing even more deeply. Do this 2x. This will take you over the peak of the contraction.

**Phase 4 (decrease):** As the contraction starts to go away, repeat Step 2, doing that breathing 4x. This time, you are intentionally calming yourself at each breath cycle. Now take 3 Cleansing Breaths to you reduce all your tension.

**Phase 5 (rest):** Go back to breathing in and out your nose. Scan inside your body and let go of any remaining tension.

### Take away

1. Use the 5-count for both inhalation and exhalation. This increases your focus and sense of control.



2. Notice the difference in how you each feel between using slack jaw or blowing exhalations.

Using either slack-jaw or blowing is fine, as long as you continue to relax inside. Having two ways to do the same thing means that, during labor, you will be able to choose the one that works best at each breath cycle.

### **Exercise #3: Other Positions**

*USE SLACK-JAW AND BLOWING EXHALATION*

Do the above in different positions: sitting, standing, lying down, kneeling, squatting.

### **Exercise #4: Timed Contractions**

*USE EITHER SLACK-JAW OR BLOWING EXHALATION*

- Time yourself for an imagined contraction that lasts 20 seconds and has a very slight discomfort. Do it 3x.
- Time yourself for a 1-minute contraction that you imagine would be manageable and not terribly painful. Repeat 3x.
- Time yourself for a 1½ minute contraction that you imagine is very, very painful. Notice that even thinking about pain can cause you to tense up! Repeat 3x.

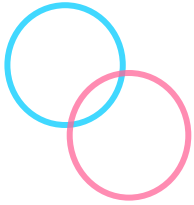
#### **Take away**

1. Practice both slack-jaw/blowing exhalation through light, intense, and very intense contractions. This way, you develop a habit: breath consciousness.

### **Exercise #5: Visual Focus**

*USE BOTH THE SLACK-JAW AND BLOWING EXHALATIONS*

- Repeat Exercise 4: Focus on an object about 1 yard/meter in front of you; at the same time, remain conscious of your breathing.
- Repeat Exercise 4: Look into your partner's eyes while you breathe together through all the 5 Phases.



- Repeat Exercise 4: Close your eyes and notice the difference between looking outward and looking inward.

### **Take away**

1. You are now learning to use your eyes to increase your breathing concentration.

## **Birthing Woman: Breathing and the 5 Phases**

### **Phase 1: Just before a contraction and as it starts**

When a contraction starts, even with breathing skills, you might still find yourself saying to yourself or others “Oh, no, here it comes again!”

Each Phase has its own importance. The importance of Phase 1 is simple: CHOOSE to use your breathing skills. This gets you off on good footing immediately, rather than feeling out of control.

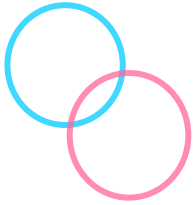
As you recognize that the contractions are feeling more painful, adapt your breathing skills by increasing your focus and commitment to each inhalation and exhalation.

### **Most important phase**

*“This was the most important phase for me. If I could go into each contraction with a set of skills to be used, then I could cope. There were a few times that I wasn’t able to do that, right after I was checked by the staff or when labor got more intense. Both these times disoriented me for a few contractions, but I knew I had to set up my skills again right at the beginning. Yes, when I couldn’t do that, I did feel out of control, but I refused to believe I couldn’t get it back.”*

### **Take away**

1. Have a breathing plan.
2. Keep your breathing as relaxed as possible. Focus your mind on ONE contraction at a time.
3. If this contraction is more intense than the last one, recognize that your labor is progressing —yippee!



## **Phase 2: As the contraction builds**

As the contraction builds, permit yourself to use a deeper inhalation and make intentionally relaxing exhalations.

This phase requires a great deal of willpower and determination, and it's where fear of the pain takes hold. It's very tempting to just succumb to the stress.

### **Deeper involvement**

*"My breathing changed during this phase along with my internal dialogue. As the contraction went up, each inhale got deeper, and each exhale had to give me deeper relaxation. My mind actually directed me."*

### **Take away**

1. Remember to have your partner breathe with you if that helps.
2. Use counting in and out as a mental focus.
3. Close your eyes or focus on a specific object or your partner's eyes as another focus.
4. Don't be afraid. This phase is just the really hard work of giving birth.

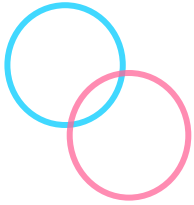
## **Phase 3: The contraction peaks**

This is the hardest part of each contraction, but it's also the shortest. This phase requires you to dig the deepest into your willpower. It is when you are least likely to want any type of distraction.

Phase 3 is also when you are most likely to say things like, "I can't," "It's too hard," "Give me something." Remember, how you behave will guide other people in how they respond to you. If you begin to act stressed or say "I can't do this; it hurts!," you will stimulate your birth provider to encourage you to use pain relief, which you might not really want.

### **I told myself otherwise**

*"Everyone told me that the peak of the contractions were the worst, but that's not what happened to me. Whenever I felt the pain was too intense, my inner voice told me 'The*



*worst is over.’ As soon as I heard that, the pain decreased enough for me to really focus on my breathing. That was so neat.”*

### **Take away**

1. Just remember the bottom line phrase you and your partner agreed upon so that you won’t be disappointed six months after the birth. Beyond that, it’s fine to say anything you want.
2. This phase is very short, so even if you lose it, be committed to getting back into the flow during Phase 4.

### **Phase 4: The contraction eases off**

If you lost it a bit at the peak, now is the time to work to get your breathing and relaxation back.

You’ll notice that, as the pain decreases, your deeper breathing is less necessary. Now you can use each inhalation to breathe in beautiful, good energy, expanding and relaxing inside your pelvic zone. Use each exhalation to more deeply relax and prepare yourself for the time between contractions when you absolutely **MUST** rest and restore yourself. At the end of this period, remember to take three deep and satisfying Cleansing Breaths.

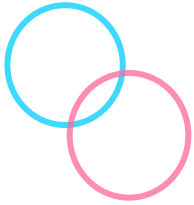
### **Cleansing Breaths were essential**

*“I looked forward to recognizing that the peak was over. I immediately started to relax my breathing. The Cleansing Breathing was essential. I loved doing it with my husband—in fact, everyone in the room. Somehow, having others join me helped me discharge the energy faster.”*

### **Take away**

1. This phase means this contraction is almost over.
  2. While Phase #1 is the beginning of your working period, Phase #4 begins your resting period. You still might have to work to relax.
- Do not think about the future.





### **Phase 5: The rest period after a contraction**

After your three Cleansing Breaths, do your best to switch as quickly as possible to a relaxed inhalation and exhalation. What you do during this rest period is vital to how you will continue to work with your baby's efforts. Now is the time to soften and relax inside your pelvis, letting go of any energy that has built up in your body or mind during this last contraction.

### **Rest and relaxing**

*"Blessed relief. Another contraction finished, and now a rest. For several hours earlier, I could just slow down and rest, but for the last few hours, I actually slept and snored. I never snore."*

*"The back labor didn't go away. That was hard, and I got restless. This made me tired because I couldn't seem to ever relax."*

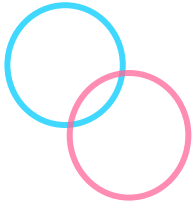
*"Thank goodness for our Pink Kit skills. I had terrible back labor but knew how to open my sacrum, so I continued to use my inhalation to open my pelvis during the space in between. This kept me focused, gave me something to do, and gave me a sense that I could continue to work with my body and baby even though the pain didn't go away."*

### **Take away**

1. Let go of this contraction: it's finished.

Being able to do this is one of the hidden resources that very skilled birthing women use. They intentionally do this so that, when the next contraction comes, they are ready to start their conscious, skillful work.

Take the next contraction as THIS ONE, rather than "OH NO, NOT ANOTHER ONE!" This is mental trickery for sure, but it works time and again.



## **Birth Coach: Breathing and the 5 Phases**

It's your turn to understand the 5 Phases through your unique eyes and ears as the birth coach. Once you understand how you can use your wonderful observation and listening skills, you'll really know how helpful you can be to your partner and your baby.

Basically, your job is to keep labor as progressive as possible. But don't do it with a whip-in-hand approach—instead, help your partner work with the 5 Phases and don't worry so much about The Big Picture. You'll both see that after your baby is born.

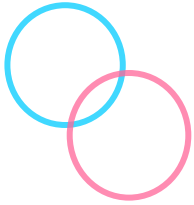
Your partner will basically do one of two things during labor. Either she will

- feel she can self-manage pretty much on her own, with you helping her as she requests, or
- feel she needs your help more or less constantly.

This can vary from one contraction to another, depending on how the pain changes as her cervix opens.

### **Don't be surprised**

*"In early labor, my wife was her normal, gorgeous self. We walked, had a bath together, cuddled through the night, and just felt so excited that we would soon meet our son. Ten hours into her labor, the pain definitely increased. She coped pretty well using her Pink Kit skills. About four hours later, she was a different person, and the changes became more dramatic over the next few hours. I had a moment when I thought, 'This isn't normal.' But my skills kicked in, and my wife showed me how to help her and was very, very clear when what I was doing wasn't the right thing at the right time. This is what I want to say to all other men: 'Learn the skills! Help and don't be surprised by anything.'"*



These are two hints about pain:

- It is unrealistic to believe that a woman can let go of all tension during each contraction, especially when they are very painful.
- It is also unrealistic to believe that a woman can always use focused, relaxed breathing at every second of the contraction's wave unless she is very, very skilled.

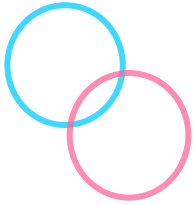
### **Help in Each Phase: Micro-Manage**

Once you understand the 5 Phases of a contraction, **you will have five different places to work with successful breathing.** You get to help your partner find all the moments within the micro-rhythm of the 5 Phases to feel in control.

Most dads are only familiar with the Small Picture, one contraction following another. This means that, if the woman feels out of control during a contraction, the dad doesn't know how to help. So one out-of-control contraction follows another.

Instead of feeling that you can't help in any way at any time, you have to figure out *when* to help, and then *how* to in each of the Phases. Everything helps. Just like driving a car, there are no linear actions that repeat again and again. Every moment of driving requires moment-to-moment creative decisions about which skills to use and how to use each skill. Men excel at this!

Pain will vary between each of the 5 Phases. Women often can self-micro-manage when the pain is manageable. If your partner isn't able to micro-manage the contractions herself, she'll want you to help her do so. Micro-management is exactly what keeps any woman feeling on top of the pain. Sure, she's going to get through every contraction whether she micro-manages or not, because the process of labor cannot be stopped. But women feel better when they are doing something for themselves at each moment, and they feel even better when you help them do just that.



Remember that a woman can't often "tell" you how to help her. You have to observe and listen. Her actions, behaviors, and sounds will tell you how she is coping. Women desperately want to cope with labor pain.

Also keep in mind that you don't have to be perfect or do something at every single moment. Just understand that every single moment *can* have a skill applied.

Here is how you might view the 5 Phases.

### **Phase 1: Just before a contraction and as it starts**

Your partner will know when a contraction is going to start, because she'll feel it inside her body. Be alert to see or hear

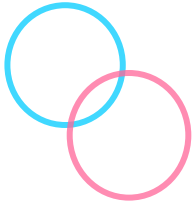
- a slight physical restlessness,
- a shifting of position, or
- a particular sound she'll make.

As the labor changes from short, painless contractions in early stages to more intense, then to the very intense stage, this beginning moment becomes more important. It is always at the beginning of the next contraction when your partner has to commit herself to working through the intensity about to come. You need to let her know you're there to help. BE THERE—help her to do the right thing for herself. Think back on the exercises above and consider which breathing skill she would best respond to. Adjust if she responds differently from when you were practicing. She might switch from preferring a slight blowing exhalation to slack jaw.

She has to continue to breathe, so she might as well use each inhalation and exhalation to overcome the discomfort she is feeling. She can do that with your assistance.

### **K.I.S.S.**

*"I was all set to use every single one of our Pink Kit skills. My wife had packed her bag to head to the hospital, and I had my Pink Tool Kit in my head and on sheets of paper to remind*



*me. In retrospect, what worked best in the most intense part of labor was to absolutely make certain my wife could see that I was ready to help her JUST as the contraction was starting. Her body language was pretty clear. I made a mistake the first few really intense contractions to wait until she had gotten herself into the position she was using...that was a mistake. She glared at me as though I was falling asleep on the job. She really needed me to immediately help her get up and get settled into whatever position she chose. Then she could cope well with little help. Lots of the earlier parts of labor, we used lots of the skills, but during this very short phase, this is what worked best. I learned what 'Keep it simple, stupid' means."*

### **Take away**

1. The more painful the contractions, the more important it is that you help your partner begin the contraction using one or more skill. Breathing skills are the first choice.

### **Phase 2: As the contraction builds**

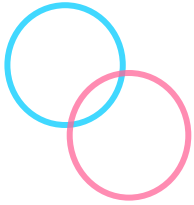
This is the time to observe and listen to how your partner is dealing with this ONE contraction. If she is coping fine, your job is to stay attentive to any need that arises. If she begins to show any type of stress, you start using a breathing skill such as you practiced above, making certain each inhalation and exhalation is focused and creates some form of relaxation.

### **Just help me now**

*"What helped my partner most during the contraction's buildup was to model very relaxed breathing. If I could get her to the peak without her expending too much energy, then she coped very well. At one point, I had to go to the toilet. I wasn't back quickly enough when the next contraction started. I arrived with her really losing it. I felt so guilty, and she must have seen that in my eyes. Impatiently, she told me to 'drop it' and just help her 'now'. I learned that you just get on with it. The past moment doesn't count, so let it go."*

### **Take away**

1. Take care of your own needs as well.
2. Don't feel guilty if you mess up—just keep on doing your best.



### **Phase 3: The contraction peaks**

The peak is always the most difficult, because it's the most painful. However, the peak is always over with very quickly. Even during the longest contractions (1½ minutes), the peak lasts for only 2-3 breath cycles. Use those limited cycles to work deeply with the breathing skills you learned in the exercises above.

### **One breath at a time**

*“The peak of a contraction, for being so short, is really complex. I learned that I could only tell my wife had reached the peak of the contraction as it was coming down, so instead of focusing on the peak, I just focused on what I could do at each breath with her. I never knew each inhale and exhale could mean so much, but then I realized that her breath really reflected her response to pain, and the pain varied, so sometimes one inhale seemed pretty calm, but the next was really deep or quite stressful. Labor had such color...or whatever you want to call it. Without The Pink Kit skills, I can't imagine what we would have done.”*

### **Take away**

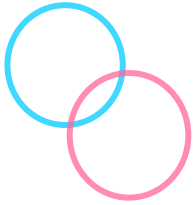
1. The exercises above are packed with skills for you to use.
2. Rest assured that she's about to enter the next phase as the pain decreases.

### **Phase 4: The contraction eases off**

If you absolutely cannot help your partner, or if she cannot get on top of a contraction when it starts, as it builds, or as it peaks, you have this phase to help her slow her breathing so she can start to discharge the built-up energy of this one contraction. This will then lead into the relaxing and resting behaviors so important in Phase 5.

The best feature of seeing the micro-timeframe of contractions as separate Phases is highlighted in this Phase. A woman can always begin to relax in some way as pain decreases, if she has the skills to do so. Women without skills hold on to the tension of each contraction, which means their fear of pain increases, as does their feeling of being overwhelmed—and this leads to the concept that women “suffer” in childbirth.

Your woman may not want to let go of the tension, still feel overwhelmed, be afraid



of the next contraction, or still have residual pain in her back, pubic bone, or hips—but she can relax, and you can help her calm her breathing.

Remember to use the Cleansing Breath with her. Usually, three breath cycles will let go of the contraction. You'll hear it in her sounds and often feel it in your own body.

### **I was good at this part**

*"I have to say, I excelled at this part of each contraction. I wasn't so good at helping my partner as the contraction built, but boy, as soon as it started to ease, my ability to help her was pretty spectacular."*

### **Take away**

1. Before you go into the birth, make certain that you and your partner's bottom line is that you will work together to achieve some form of relaxation at least in this phase and the next one.

### **Phase 5: The rest period after a contraction**

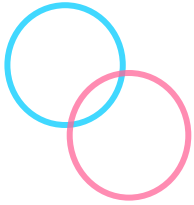
This is the time to really work with the skills you have practiced above. You should know what type of breathing indicates that she is relaxing, settled, calm, and even sleepy. And remember to ask her if there are other things she'd like you to do.

### **I felt like a coach**

*"What worked for us was for me to whisper into my wife's ear, telling her how I wanted each inhalation and exhalation to sound like. Gosh, that sounds so weird to say that, but at the time she needed me to say something like, 'Really inhale deeply in your nose for this breath, and exhale deeply out your nose now, great. Now this inhale, just inhale more deeply, good, and let go more deeply on your exhale, great. Now begin to soften your inhale and exhale, good. And again. Good.' It really worked, because once she got settled, she always smiled and squeezed my hand or told me how much it helped. I really felt like a coach. What a monumental effort labor is."*

### **Take away**

1. You also need to relax during this period.



2. Make certain you have her “resting place” all sorted so she can get to it easily, settle down (she might have 1-3 minutes of Phase 5), and then be able to change into her “working place” easily.
3. Although this one contraction is over, your job is to make certain she is comfortable and ready for the next. It’s sort of like the coach at a boxing match: water, rub down, pep-talk, massage. She might not want all those things, but she needs them, because she’s between rounds.

## Touch and the 5 Phases

In childbirth, the purpose of touch is to reduce tension, bring comfort, and act as a focus. However, touch, when not used well, can be a cause of huge conflict between the two of you. Given that you now know labor has a Big and Small Picture as well as this micro 5 Phase rhythm, you’ve probably guessed that there are certain times a woman will be more receptive to being touched than others.

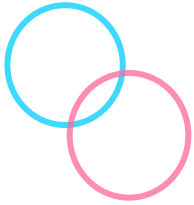
This is one scenario that commonly leads to a conflict:

A birthing woman is obviously in pain. The man wants to help her relax, so he reaches out to touch her, but she flicks his hand away or tells him “DON’T TOUCH ME!” He interprets this as a rejection and spends most of his time just being there, not knowing what to do.

Since no one can know what their labor will be like, women also won’t know how they will respond to touch. This has caught off-guard lots of families who usually share a lot of touch between them. Something happens in labor, and suddenly women who like to be touched can’t stand it.

You want to avoid touch conflicts at all costs. You always have to breathe, but you don’t always have to be touched. Touch is a choice. How you breathe is also a choice, and how you are touched or how you touch is another choice.





So it's important that, together, you learn the best times to use touch to help a woman focus, to reduce tension, and to bring comfort. Both of you also want to know where a woman holds tension so you can use touch to help achieve the deep, inner relaxation that will help your baby come down, through, and out of its home.

### **Birthing Woman: Touch and the 5 Phases**

Birthing Better with The Pink Kit Method® is a unique approach to pregnancy and childbirth. Most systems encourage you to get out of your head. Birthing Better encourages you to use your head to work with your body. This mind/body connection is how you can work with your baby's efforts to be born.

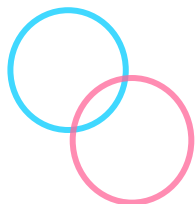
Most people think of touch as something physical occurring on the outside of our body. If you pat your belly, your hand is touching the outside of your body. If your partner pats your belly, that touch is also from the outside. The touches are different, but they occur outside, for the most part. Now, though, you can use your mental direction to "touch" inside your body by giving your body commands.

Using imagined touch, mentally go around the inside of your pelvis, intentionally softening at each point, as if it is a clock. With the Pelvic Clock, you are touching your body with your mind. This is the foundation for the use of your Touch skills.

Remember that your husband, partner, friend, or relative coach cannot read your mind. First, you need to intentionally soften inside your hips, your lower back, and lower belly. Then, you need to ask for or show your partner where and how to touch you. Many women just like to have a hand placed on a very specific spot as a cue for their internal relaxation. Both the intentional softening you do for yourself and having your partner place his hand on a spot under which you'll intentionally relax takes practice. Obviously, pregnancy is the time to do this practicing.

#### **Phase 1: Just before a contraction and as it starts**

This is the time to set up the skill/s you will use for this contraction. It's not an either/or about breathing or softening. You can do both.



Use your conscious awareness to check and manage your internal tension now, because the contraction's purpose is to pull the top of your vagina to where the cervix is, toward the inside of your pelvic bones. By relaxing that tissue, you make the job easier for your body.

This is an example of your own personal Touch skills that cannot be underestimated. As women, we use our partner's touch as cues, but ultimately we must rely on ourselves to do the actual relaxing.

### **Enough time**

*"The end of one contraction and the beginning of another sort of blended together — they came so close together. I was told most contractions have a few minutes between. Mine came every 10 seconds or so. But I still knew when another contraction was starting by the sensations that happened in my head. I had enough time to soften around my Pelvic Clock before each contraction started; I couldn't do it once it started, then my internal focus changed to making certain I was in a position that felt open."*

### **Take away**

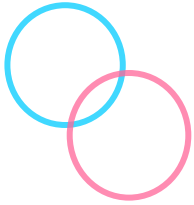
1. The start is such an important phase. If you start with one or more skills and feel in control, you are more likely to stay in control throughout the 5 Phases of each contraction.
2. The more painful the contractions become, the more essential this phase is.

### **Phase 2: As the contraction builds**

You might prefer either self-directed relaxation during this phase OR want your partner to touch a specific part of your body to help you maintain relaxation.

Your partner can't touch your cervix, but when he touches either hip, your sacrum, or pubic bone, you can soften inside your Pelvic Clock and on that side of your cervix, as well, even though it is deeper inside your body.

On the other hand, this skill might be put aside until some other Phase. The great thing about your Birthing Better Pink Kit skills is the ability to tweak them as needed.



### **Choosing the right skill at the right time**

*“As a solo mum, I wasn’t certain I could self-coach myself, but learning these Pink Kit skills gave me more confidence. I didn’t need to go around The Pelvic Clock as the contractions became more intense. I could feel the tissue expanding outward. What I seemed to then do naturally or instinctively was the Cervical Relaxation. There were some times this did create much more pain, but it felt as though I was making my labor contractions more effective. This meant I often felt conflict. On the one hand, I didn’t like the increased pain. On the other hand, my mind just kept doing these two things as though my body was telling my mind I had chosen the right thing to do at the right time. My biggest surprise was how many conversations I was having inside my head at the same time.”*

#### **Take away**

1. Use the skills that feel efficacious to you in the moment.
2. If you put away a certain skill during this phase, that doesn’t mean you can’t pick it up again later.

### **Phase 3: The contraction peaks**

This phase tends to be an either/or touch period—yes or no. You’ll know.

#### **Don’t touch me**

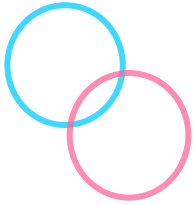
*“Nope...didn’t want anyone to touch me during the peak. I had to concentrate really hard.”*

#### **Take away**

1. Something is always touching you or you are always touching something, even if it’s only the air around you and the floor under your feet.
2. Use touch when and how you want.

### **Phase 4: The contraction eases off**

Once you know the peak has come and gone and the pain is subsiding, use your internal awareness to assess how much tension you are storing inside your pelvis. This is a great time to go around inside your pelvis again. In a symbolic manner, this is how you touch/work with your child. Work is a form of touching. We just don’t think of it in this manner.



You can always ask your partner to touch you in specific places, such as your legs, pelvis, sacrum, belly, back, shoulders, and neck, while you soften under his touch.

### **I controlled myself**

*“Once the peak let off and the pain began to go away, it was heavenly. But later in my labor, I started to have back pain continuing. At first, this frightened me. But I took control of myself and just placed my hands and then my partner’s hands on the places that were painful. Then I used my breathing to inhale and expand and exhale and relax. This helped so much.”*

### **Take away**

1. This Phase is vitally important for your baby. The more you soften and relax inside, the easier it is for your baby to open your body.
2. Combine your awareness touch with physical touch from your partner.

### **Phase 5: The rest period after a contraction**

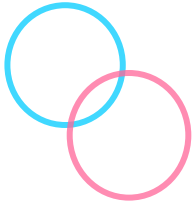
This is the Phase to use touch to help you deeply relax as quickly as possible and let go of any tension, through either general massage or specific touch. You may have only 2-5 minutes between contractions. Do your best not to waste any of that time remaining tense.

This is also a great time to talk about how touch could be used in the next contraction.

And this is the time to thank your partner if his touch helped you in this one contraction. Compliments go a long, long way to help your partner feel reassured that he is seeing and hearing what your needs are.

### **Exactly what I needed**

*“Without my husband’s caring and effective touch skills, I know I would not feel as proud of myself. His touch was so sensitive and helpful—at times, I didn’t know I was tensing up some place, but as soon as he lightly touched it, I immediately relaxed. After each contraction, I just let my love for him flow out my eyes and my touch. I didn’t have the words to express what I felt.”*



### Take away

1. Let go!
2. Make certain to help your partner know how best to help you. Keep refining how you use your skills.

## Birth Coach: Touch and the 5 Phases

Now it's time to talk to you guys. Keep in mind that breathing together, communicating well, and physical touch are all forms of "touch." We just have to broaden terms and then understand what we are all talking about. If you're not sure about whether, how, where, or when you should "touch" her, ask her!

### Phase 1: Just before a contraction and as it starts

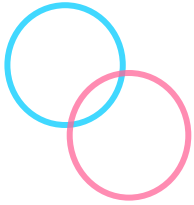
This point is very easy to miss. You might find that, if you've been touching her before this phase begins, she'll flick off your hand now. That's a clue! If she is irritable with you at the very beginning of a contraction, don't worry; just ask her during Phase 5 what she would like you to do as the contraction starts.

### In the first few seconds...

*"Between contractions, I made certain that some part of my body was resting softly against my wife's body, usually my leg against her leg, the side of my hand against her arm. I didn't move that touch much, just rested. As soon as the next contraction arrived, she was overly sensitive and always flicked my touch away, or when I spotted the signs I removed my touch. In those first few seconds, she just didn't want any touch at all. After that, she welcomed touch—but I always had to stay aware this could change at any moment."*

### Take away

1. As contractions get more painful, the start of the next one stimulates fear in women, because they don't know how painful it will be. It's always a struggle to accept something when you have no control. This is what your partner is dealing with.
2. Watch her reaction and be very thoughtful about where and how you touch her. Sometimes, having just one finger resting against her leg gives her the sense of connection she needs with you.



## **Phase 2: As the contraction builds**

If you don't know what kind of touch she wants, ask her. Don't expect words, but rather non-verbal nods, frowns, etc., and be willing to change what you're doing as the contraction moves towards its peak.

### **I paid attention to her body**

*"Because we had really worked through all the Pink Kit skills, I had learned to recognize tension in my partner's body by observing her and also touching her. She loved that I was so intrigued with her body. I totally, totally understood that our baby was a big object, and any tension in my partner's body might make it harder. What we worked on as the contractions became more painful was that it helped her for me to touch any place in her body that appeared tense to me. She immediately relaxed those places. It was neat, and she seemed to be able to handle the pain better."*

### **Take away**

1. Work with each inhalation and each exhalation, if necessary, when you use touch.
2. Your partner might like you to touch her only on the exhalation.

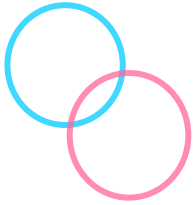
## **Phase 3: The contraction peaks**

If there is any point that your partner does not want touch during a contraction, it is most likely to be during the peak. Remember, it only lasts for 2-3 breath cycles, so just wait or breathe with her. You'll get better and better at figuring out when to help versus when to step back for a bit.

Keep in mind that your partner does not need to be perfect or even exceptional or even above average in how she manages what can be intense pain during contractions. She just needs to do as well as she can in the moment. Your skills can make all the difference between her feeling somewhat in control to feeling totally overwhelmed, all the way to feeling very in control. You are that important!

### **It was rough, but I just dealt with it**

*"She clung to me at the peak, often threatening to bite the top of my shoulder. No, that wasn't going to do for me, so I folded up a face towel and put it on my shoulder so she could clamp down."*



### **Take away**

1. So what if you miss doing something. There will always be another moment.

### **Phase 4: The contraction eases off**

This is a great time to have her place your hand on parts of her body that she specifically wants to relax.

### **I helped a specific place**

*“This was the time when my wife could let go of her big bum muscles. I’d noticed that as the pain increased during the early part of the contractions, she would tighten her bum muscles. Once the peak passed, then I could just gently jiggle each side in the palm of my hands, and she would settle down and let go. I saw a lot of her backside, but after the birth she told me how helpful it was.”*

### **Take away**

1. If your partner is comfortable with you touching her during this phase, you want to feel or see her soften or relax under your touch, even if the change is subtle.

### **Phase 5: The rest period after a contraction**

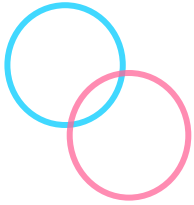
Keep using touch skills to help her create inner relaxation. These last two Phases are the very best times to use touch extensively. Use communication skills as well. Remember, talking is a form of audio touch.

### **We had a routine**

*“Between contractions, we cuddled heaps. It was sort of like going through a routine of wash her face, massage her shoulders, give her big hugs, touch around her Pelvic Clock, get her a drink, massage her hands, and away to the next one.”*

### **Take away**

1. One more contraction is completed, never to come again.
2. Don’t assume the next one will be like the last one. Labors progress, and contractions must become stronger, get longer and closer together until the cervix fully opens. Then the pain is gone, and she’ll begin to push, and your baby will soon be born.



## Communication and the 5 Phases

As humans, we breathe all the time, touch or are touched at every moment, and we're communicating constantly. Breathing is the most defined. Although breath can vary depending on what we are doing, we breathe in, and we breathe out—clear enough.

Touch is much more ambiguous. It is diverse throughout our daily activities. There is not one moment in our lives when we are not touched by something, and the ways of touching and being touched are infinite. Communication is just as inconsistent, and even more elusive.

Giving birth heightens all senses: breathing, touch, and communication are senses. Your Birthing Better Pink Kit skills help you utilize them to enhance your personal experience.

Communication in the early part of labor is no different than your ordinary communication. You'll focus on the things you need to do:

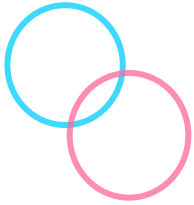
- pack your bag
- get to the hospital
- call your midwife
- set up your home birthing pool
- call friends and family

This is just the same as breathing and touch, which don't change until pain accompanies the contractions.

Once pain becomes a part of the birthing process, communication changes and can par down to bare basics:

- one or two words
- non-verbal gestures





- touch to aid in relaxation
- a fair amount of telepathic connectedness. Maybe it's not actual telepathy, but, when people work well together, there is a certain amount of awareness that builds and gets used.

Your birth provider will definitely notice how you breathe, what you sound like, or even how your face looks: stressed or relaxed. Your birth provider may be impressed by the touch skills, although not have a clue what you are doing. However, your birth provider will probably not have a clue how you are using communication, particularly if a lot is non-verbal. She/he will just think you are a great couple.

That's okay. Your birth is for you.

### **Birthing Woman: Communication and the 5 Phases**

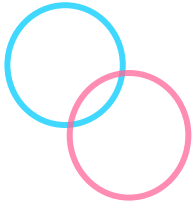
#### **Phase 1: Just before a contraction and as it starts**

This Phase is very short, and it's easy for your negative voice to scream out "Oh, no, not another one!" Even if you coped well with the last contraction, it's not uncommon to have your negative voice start up, particularly if your labor is progressing and this contraction is more intense than the last.

This is the time to decide what skills to put into place, to let your partner know how to help, and to override your negative voice with your management skills.

#### **He guessed what I needed**

*"I was frightened to really rest between contractions, because I was afraid I'd wake up in the middle of a contraction and just freak out, but I was SO tired. I remember that The Pink Kit had said this was what happened at the very end of labor, and I had to find a way to communicate with my husband how best to help me. I needed him to know as soon as a contraction started and start to help me so I could really rest. Just as I was thinking this through, he said 'Don't worry, I've got it covered. Just before a contraction, you shift position and I'll be right there for you. Just rest now.' I loved him so much. What a gift he gave me."*



### **Take away**

1. Making a decision is a form of self-talk.
2. Letting your partner know how to help might be only a look, nod, or word.
3. Focus on your skills rather than any negative thoughts— but don't deny the negative talk...you can still manage really well, no matter what you are saying to yourself.

### **Phase 2: As the contraction builds**

This is the Phase when you really tell yourself which skills to use, how, and when. For skilled women, this Phase has an element of exhilaration! This is when we KNOW that we are truly working together with our child through this incredible process, EVEN if our negative voice is prattling along. This is the time when we absolutely know we don't have to like the experience in order to be a great birthing woman.

### **She helped until I got my rhythm**

*"I really liked it when my sister breathed with me [a form of non-verbal language]. We just breathed together until I got my rhythm, and then I was fine. It was always when the contraction was building that she could help me the best. I didn't want or need her to speak to me during the rest of the contraction. It was great that she could really help me like that."*

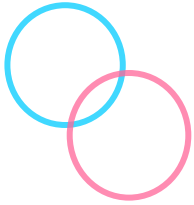
### **Take away**

1. Remember—it's always one contraction at a time.
2. Use your inner voice to instruct your body what to do.

### **Phase 3: The contraction peaks**

This Phase doesn't last long, so really use your determination to meet the challenge. This is where you can change your negative words from "Oh, it hurts so much" to "Stay focused" or "Open" or "Ride the wave!"

This is also the Phase where gestures, facial expressions, and eye messages can really help your partner know what you need or don't need.



### **Say it out loud—and then shut up**

*“I could handle all the buildup of the contraction except the 15-second peak. I needed my husband to verbally say ‘Just one more breath, just one more breath.’ Then, once the peak passed, I wanted him to shut up. He just did what I asked and knew that was what helped me the most.”*

### **Take away**

1. Your breath, your position, your face, and your posture will tell everyone how well you are doing.
2. If you’re managing well, go for it.
3. If you need help, ask for it.

### **Phase 4: The contraction eases off**

This is the Phase when you can tell yourself, “Thank goodness, it’s almost over!” It’s also when your choices become important again. Unskilled women have heaps of trouble letting go of the energy that has built up, because they are already thinking of the next contraction. With your skills, you know that you must unwind from this ONE.

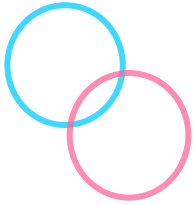
This does not come automatically, intuitively, or instinctively. You must instruct yourself to do so. Scan your whole body bit by bit, and instruct it to let go.

### **Only needed help after the peak**

*“My daughter was struggling with this part of labor, and she was very resistant to my help. I tried to help when the contraction was starting, building, or at the peak, but she said ‘NO’ to any help that I offered. When I changed to only offering suggestions once the peak had passed, she took them on. Bingo. We’d found the best time and way to help her, and that helped her manage the other phases of the contractions, too. Oh, how I wish I had known this information when I gave birth to her! Like so many of us, we were left alone in a ward to do the best we could.”*

### **Take away**

1. Do not underestimate how powerful your mental instruction is. The mind of a woman becomes even more acute while giving birth.



### **Phase 5: The rest period after a contraction**

This is the other time when your choices will make all the difference in the world. There is no doubt that unskilled women do not use this rest period or time between contractions well. Instead of fully resting and reducing residual internal tension, they stay on guard, dreading and waiting for the next contraction.

This phase is crucial for your continued ability to stay on top of the experience. You can't leave and take a break from giving birth, yet here you are, in a break! You're not leaving the experience; you just don't have to work as hard as you do during contractions. So, it's absolutely indispensable that you use this time — which is usually 2-3 times as long as the preceding contraction — for micro-breaks.

Now is the time to talk to your coach about any help you need or about how to change your pattern of response to the next contraction. You also get to reassess the skills you were using. Good labor management is all about scanning, assessing, and making changes for next time, and you'll be able to do it in a fraction of the time it takes to read this.

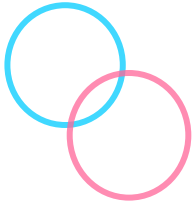
And you can do all of this while being totally relaxed. This is Being in the Flow.

If you noticed that the intensity of the last contraction notched up and you aren't certain what is going on, don't hesitate to check yourself during Phase 5 or have your partner do so. Your care provider will check you only on a macro-timeframe; you can do it anytime. Contractions change in correlation to internal change. Your baby is moving down through your bony tube and dilating your cervix further or moving through an open cervix into your birth canal.

You do not have to wait for someone else to tell you what's happening or where you are. Use tactile communication between your mind and body — feel inside for change.

### **I talked myself through it**

*"In between contractions, I kept going around the Pelvic Clock. I'd say to myself, 'Relax at 12 o'clock; relax at 3 o'clock; etc.' I could talk myself through three times around, plus once*



*around my cervix, before another contraction came on. I could actually feel how effectively my cervix was opening because I had relaxed.”*

### **I loved connecting my brain and body**

*“Whenever the contractions got more intense, and that was after four or five of them, I just slipped my finger in and felt for some change inside. Each time, I could feel my cervix closer to the inside of my pubic bone, and then I could feel that the cervix had dilated fully—then I felt like pushing. No, actually, my body just started to push my baby out. I loved connecting my brain to what was going on inside. I never felt lost or out of control.”*

Once you understand that communication within yourself is vital to how you perceive of your experience, you’ll use your internal dialogue to guide yourself.

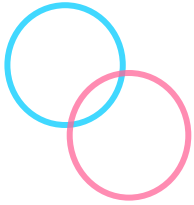
Dialogue? Shouldn’t this be a monologue? Not really. Usually, we have two inner voices: the skilled, guiding manager, and the commentator on how we feel—and during pain, this second voice WILL comment.

The best way to deal with this voice, which might be saying very negative things, is to acknowledge it and get on with putting your management skills in place.

### **Birth Coach: Communication and the 5 Phases**

The Feminist debate has often revolved around “men’s inability to communicate.” That’s nuts. You communicate all the time. If you’re sitting there listening to your wife tell you what she is thinking or wants, she is communicating with you verbally. Even if you only listen and don’t reply to her, you are still communicating, even if your non-verbal message is that you don’t feel like talking. Communication comprises both verbal and non-verbal language.

If you’re a non-verbal communicator, you will excel with your Birthing Better Pink Kit skills. In fact, most women would prefer you to see and hear when they need help, rather than have to ask you for help.



The reason women often talk too much or seem to be demanding too much is because you haven't always been taught how to observe and hear what needs to be done and then do it.

Women have a biological mandate to grow along with the baby that is growing inside. Men have to make the choice to grow during pregnancy. You can find out what skills you need to grow during pregnancy from <http://birthingbetter.com/expectant-fathers-blog/>

By the time you get into labor, you want your birth coaching skills to come into play. Each of the 5 Phases gives you an opportunity to communicate with your birthing partner. When your partner is working during these 5 Phases, what you are seeing is her communicating with your baby. This is what "working with your baby's efforts to be born" means.

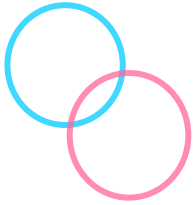
You can do a great deal to make certain her work efforts are supported and helped by using your observation and listening skills to hear whether she needs your help. When she knows you are working with her and will continue to so, this is also a form of communication. You have communicated to her that you are a capable man, compassionate father, and involved partner.

### **The right thing at the wrong time**

*A woman had taught her husband that she needed him to say "I love you" often. He had learned to do that. It was actually a simple request, and he did love her and want to please her and have her feel loved. During the birth of their first child (and during the pushing phase of 2<sup>nd</sup> stage), he could really tell how hard she was working to bring their baby out her vagina. He was so moved by seeing his son's head that he spontaneously said "I love you so much." She turned around to him and said "THAT'S NOT THE ISSUE NOW."*

### **Phase 1: Just before a contraction and as it starts**

Curiously, it is during this unknown (to you) Phase 1 that your partner may judge your attentiveness, although that's not fair. But you need to understand that, when a painful contraction starts, she won't know whether this contraction will be as manageable as the last or whether the pain will get worse.



During painful labor contractions, it's easy for a birthing woman to wonder how long will "this" (meaning the labor) take? Labor can be daunting. There is actually no end in sight UNTIL a woman gets fully dilated and starts to push. Since she can't know how long it will take, she wants you to be right there as soon as she has to start to work with what is going to be a painful 1-2 minutes of her life.

Any delay in starting to help your partner is usually caused by poor communication. Your job is to develop a good communication system with her. She's communicating first and foremost with the rhythm of these 5 Phases. Your job is to make certain your communication helps her do that.

### **I loved being alert**

*"During the more intense part of labor, my wife was very still and quiet between contractions, with her eyes closed. It was best for me to do the same thing. I stayed very close to her, just lightly touching the outside of one leg with the little finger closest to her.*

*"When she would slightly shift her body as a contraction started, I would immediately be alert to her needs. Those changed, but by being alert, I could make any change with her. I loved that alertness. It was very much like meeting the challenge or finding the solution in the work I do.*

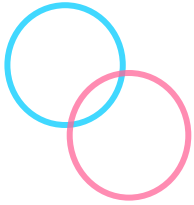
*"After the birth, we talked about it, and she told me how much it helped her to KNOW that I would be there as she came out of her sleeping rest to a full-blown contraction. She didn't even realize that she'd given me body clues. Without the Pink Kit, I would never have noticed them."*

### **Take away**

1. Your job is to let her know you are engaged and will help. She will NOT care if this is non-verbal. In fact, she'll prefer less words and more action.

### **Phase 2: As the contraction builds**

Use words, gestures, and model behaviors that help her to center herself. Notice how she is coping with the rise of energy, but don't talk about it now — wait until Phase 5, when she can listen to you.



Even helping her get into the best position is a form of communication AND touch. While she and you are doing that, she still has to breathe, so pay attention to what that sounds like, as well.

Now you can see how all these skills come together.

### **We got it just as she liked it**

*“Early in labor, my girlfriend moved around a lot. She was quite restless, wanting this, not wanting that. I realized I had to help her find the exact best position and the best way to cope with the contractions. It took a little fiddling with furniture, pillows, and seating arrangements, but eventually we got it just as she liked it. I felt very good about myself—the Pink Kit helped me see and hear SO MUCH more during labor than I thought a man could. And I could communicate that to her by my actions and willingness to pay attention to detail. We got things JUST as she liked—moment to moment.”*

### **Take away**

1. Engaging during Phase 2 shows her that you are really attentive to the details.

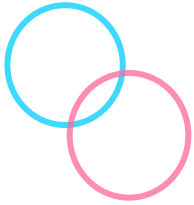
### **Phase 3: The contraction peaks**

When labor really gets intense, this is not the time to become afraid. Fear often causes inaction and an inability to think clearly. If you fear that the pain is a problem that encroaches on your partner or baby’s wellbeing, ask about it! Your birth provider will most likely say, “This intensity is part of labor and indicates that the cervix is opening more and labor will soon shift to 2<sup>nd</sup> stage—then your baby will be born.” In other words, the intense pain of labor contractions is normal.

Don’t let your negative voice get the best of you. Keep in mind that your inner communication can make you withdraw or lose confidence. You don’t want that.

Phase 3 is the most difficult phase, as you know. In many women’s mind, the peak suggests that the pain will go on and on and on. This is where the heart of Man is so important. Never forget that men have a chest full of strength and love. Perhaps this





is all symbolic, but male attributes have always been synonymous with the steadfast, and we can assume that is founded on truth.

### **Shhh**

*“Whenever the contraction peaked, my wife said ‘SHHH!’ or flicked off my touch. She needed absolute concentration. I was her rock. As the contraction eased, she wanted our teamwork.”*

### **Take away**

1. You matter.

### **Phase 4: The contraction eases off**

During this phase is when you can do more talking! Use the Cleansing Breath at the very end of this phase, two or three times. Help her begin to relax with each breath. Talk her through relaxing/softening; use the words you agreed on when you practiced. This will help her let go of the energy of the contraction.

### **A repetitive technique**

*“We worked really hard with the end of each contraction during the last four hours of labor. My wife needed to let go the energy from each contraction, or she didn’t relax well in between. We developed a repetitive technique: three cleansing breaths, then a verbal reminder of where to soften inside, then a touch reminder, and then leave her alone.”*

### **Take away**

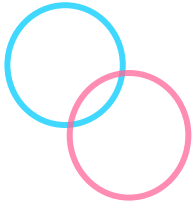
1. ALL of these are forms of communication.

### **Phase 5: The rest period after a contraction**

After you’ve used the Cleansing Breath, help her get her breathing relaxed. Repeat the list of places where she needs to soften. Ask her if there is anything else she needs.

### **She was so powerful!**

*“After the really intense contractions were over, my wife really liked me to work with her sacrum and do a Hip Lift. We did them slowly, and I told her all the specific places to relax.”*



*Then she'd get up into an open sitting position and continued to rest with her eyes closed until the next contraction arrived. She was so focused and concentrated. She was so powerful, and I was amazed. After the birth, she just wanted to do it again!"*

### **Take away**

1. You will repeat all of the above again and again for the hours it takes for the cervix to open and your baby to move down into the birth canal.

### **I got the high**

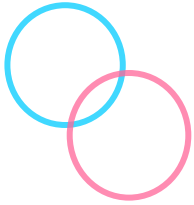
*"After two Pink Kit children, I've gotten the 'high' my wife gets after birth. This is the gift women receive for doing such hard work, and as a man, just because I helped her so well, I got it too. It's the high of having accomplished so much and done a job well."*

### **We did it**

*"I wasn't certain what our doctor or staff at the hospital expected of me, so I was a bit nervous about using our Pink Kit skills, thinking I would get in their way. What I discovered is that the staff came and went, the doctor arrived once to check my wife and then not until the delivery. Meanwhile, we were left alone. Using the skills sure seemed to fit in. Playing cards certainly wasn't the task of the day. So we got stuck in. My wife helped me know how to help her, and that made me feel really good. For months after the birth, my wife told our birth story over and over again, and I was always central to her story as well. I could see the gratefulness and love she had for me."*

### **Conclusion**

There is no doubt that giving birth can be very challenging once pain becomes a big part of the equation. However, if you practice your skills well so they become part of you, then choose which skills work best to help you manage the pain during each Phase, you'll feel really good after the birth. Just stay in the Now. Use your management voice and your breathing/touch skills, acknowledging that you have some negative thoughts. It's okay and possible for both of you to have negative thoughts and still manage well. In fact, many times in your Life, you will meet challenging situations where the skill of accepting the negative while acting in the positive can help you move through a difficult time.



## The Bell-Shaped Curve

Now that you've learned about the 5 Phases, it's necessary to add another dimension: the shape of contractions.

Through the 5 Phases, efficacious contractions define a shape that can be drawn on a graph, as they start, get more intense, reach a peak, subside, and end. If you have a fetal monitor strapped to your belly, you can actually see the shape of the contractions. This is called the Bell-Shaped Curve, and it is how you read whether each contraction is efficacious.

What does that mean? A bell-shaped contraction is the message your baby gives you that there is nothing inside your birthing body that stops your baby's ability to open its home and come down, through, and out.

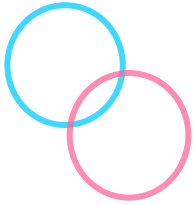
Although a bell shape implies that the rising and falling sides of the curve are even, that is not always true. Some contractions seem to come on very strong and die away very slowly. Others come on slowly, have a strong peak, and leave quickly.

There are even some births when the contractions rise to a peak fast and the space between is very short. These will seem more like a very pointy bell-shaped curve. This type of birth is very progressive. Usually, this is indicative of a labor that will be relatively short. But it will still take time, from 3-6 hours (compared to the average 6-12 hours, or a longish labor of 12-24 hours).

### Flat Contractions

The real importance of the bell shape is in comparing it to a contraction that doesn't quite seem to peak, but rather plateaus.

Common sense rules here. When contractions are effective (contain a bell-shaped curve), labor is progressive (changing every hour or so) until the birth.



When contractions do not maintain the bell curve, the labor is often not progressing and lingers. When contractions are not efficacious, the birth process becomes tedious, boring, upsetting, annoying, and frustrating. This IS the single, most common reason why women stop using their ability to behave, act, manage, cope, handle, or deal well with the birthing process and end up with increased medical interventions.

The ability to notice whether contractions maintain their nice curve up, over, and down resides best in you, father-to-be.

### **Birth Coach: Maintaining a Bell-Shaped Curve**

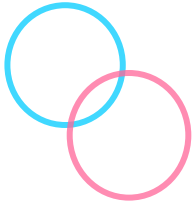
A common cause of change from progressing, bell-shaped contractions to flat ones is when a woman adopts a new position that, for some reason, your baby doesn't particularly like. This can also go the reverse way. Your partner might be in a position that your baby doesn't like, and she has flat contractions for hours. Then she changes into another position that helps your baby, and contractions pick up.

Flat contractions are also commonly caused by the following:

- Some form of internal tension
- A lack of some form of downward gravity
- A need to create more internal space

Women sometimes recognize effective contractions and will comment "That was a good one" or "That was effective." A woman can also recognize flat contractions, but sometimes only after a period has passed: "I feel like I've been in labor forever," or "I don't feel anything changing," or "I feel like I'm having the same contractions over and over."

Your job is to recognize flat contractions sooner than your partner and not let them go on for hours and hours. It is up to you to remedy whichever of the above causes pertains to your partner. Your birth professionals may not even recognize flat contractions. As nice as they are, you are one of many, many families, and they just



don't have the time to notice the details. That's your job, and it shouldn't be theirs, and it isn't.

As the birth coach, you are most likely to notice the difference between the two kinds of contractions by listening to the sounds your partner is making. An effective contraction will rise up and peak and then go away, whereas a flat contraction goes up and seems to just level off and then dissipate. It's sort of like an almost-sneeze.

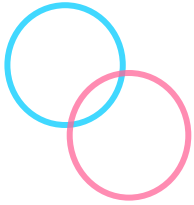
Your Birthing Better Pink Kit skills will rise to the challenge of problem-solving. This does not mean there is necessarily a problem with wellbeing; it just means that the efforts of your baby are somehow hindered. If contractions that roughly follow the bell-shaped curve mean the baby is happy with its ability to do its job, flat contractions simply indicate a need for change. You want to remember birth is just an object that has to come out of a container—a lot like plumbing. You have to figure out how to keep the container—your birthing partner—open even when she is experiencing the normal pain of giving birth.

### **Women don't always like efficacious contractions**

When labor is really progressing, your partner might find it very hard to accept the intensity and efficaciousness of the contractions. She might want to get into any position that will ease the contractions off. Sometimes, this is leaning forward or getting on her hands and knees.

Rest assured, this is NOT uncommon. Labor is intense, and sometimes a woman just wants to take a break. Some women express it quite clearly: "I'll go off for lunch now. You take over and I'll be back in an hour or so."

It's not that your partner shouldn't take a break. If she absolutely NEEDS to rest, do that, for anywhere from 15 minutes (3-5 contractions) to even 45 minutes, but keep talking with her about how you can help her get her energy gathered again so she can get back into a position that keeps the labor progressive.



Always keep a balance between resting and getting labor over with! As an alternative to easing the contractions, perhaps she all she needs is:

- some water to drink
- some candy to suck
- a bit of sleep
- a massage, shower
- to be left alone to figure out what she wants to do
- a hug
- the staff to check her
- for you check her dilation or for herself to reach in and touch the baby's head

More than anything, she will want your encouragement and confidence that you'll do everything in your power to help her cope with every moment of these very intense, progressive contractions.

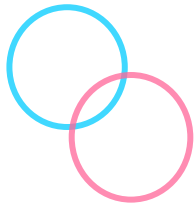
Resting and little distractions are not wrong or bad. They're a way to conserve energy. Just recognize the need, rest, and then be willing to reengage in the work.

### **At the end of the Big Picture, try to meet her needs**

Most likely, if she is at the point of REALLY wanting rest, she is close to giving birth. Neither of you want her to stay in labor longer than she needs to, so, even if she is really tired, she needs to get back into positions that the baby likes.

This is where your behavior is most critical. Perform, operate, work, manage, take action, proceed, manage, handle, deal with it, hack it, get by, and muddle through. In other words, help your partner! This means you need to assist, aid, lend a hand, help out, facilitate, rally round, and be of assistance, rather than just be there for her. This is the difference between being a coach and mere "support."

How will your partner respond to you? If you are working together well, she will recognize that you are helping her see the reality: she needs to get on with giving



birth. Then she will overcome her resistance, gather her courage, and be willing to engage again in the progressive nature of your baby's birth.

### **Conclusion**

After the birth, in the privacy of your own home, this will be an extraordinarily special experience you will talk about again and again. She will want to know what you saw or heard that helped you know labor had stopped progressing. You'll also want to know what she was feeling and thinking about that caused her to lose confidence momentarily. And, together, you will relive how you worked together to bring your baby into the world in a way you are both proud of.