

BREATH, COMMUNICATION, AND TOUCH

Positive/Negative Voice



Pink **KIT**
METHOD®

Positive and Negative Voice

Published by Common Knowledge Trust
P.O. Box 892
Nelson, New Zealand
www.commonknowledgetrust.com

Editor: Kayla D. Rau

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ISBN 978-1-927144-12-1

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Birthing Better with The Pink Kit Method®
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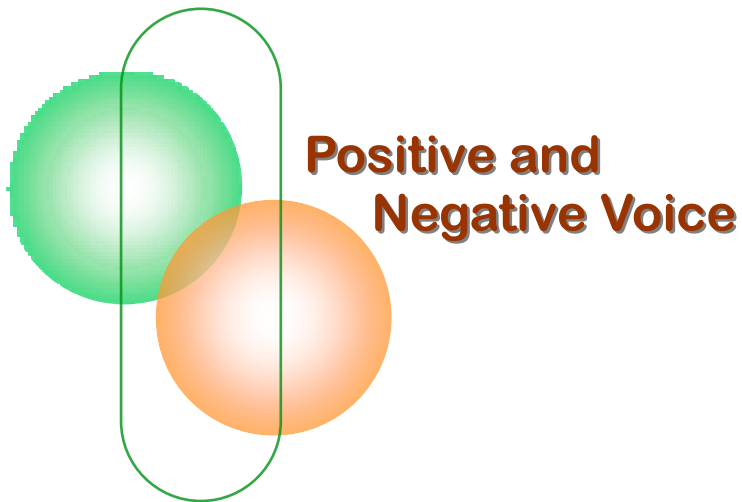


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Communication Within

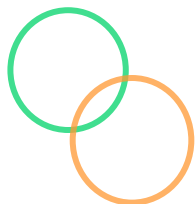
In “Communication,” you are asked to take both the Doer and Receiver roles to develop empathy and increased communication that will enhance your teamwork (see “Teamwork”). Now you achieve those same goals by looking at the internal language of both the woman giving birth and the birth coach who observes her. Both of you need to read the below so you understand inner dialogue as opposed to outward communication.

You cannot read another person’s mind, but you can understand that childbirth does kindle very commonly shared thoughts. Just as the physical process is similar for all birthing women, so is the self-talk comparable. For instance, it’s common for birthing women to internally discuss whether the pain is less or more than they anticipated. It’s uncommon for birthing women to have an internal discussion about what to prepare for dinner or whether it will rain tomorrow.

Once you understand the internal dialogue shared by many birthing teams, you can use your Birthing Better Pink Kit skills to work with the common negative thoughts through positive, self-managing behaviors. Learning how to work with your internal voice can make all the difference in the world for the memories that will form the basis for your Birth Story.

Internal Dialogue

Our neo-cortex, the part of the brain responsible for internal dialogue, holds a great deal of our consciousness/awareness as well as our ability to evaluate, modify, and make choices. Our internal conversation is part of every aspect of living. In fact, we tend to internally talk our way through our lives. There are times we are really aware of this internal voice. Giving birth is one of those times. Both of you already have an internal language about the pregnancy and the upcoming birth. Don’t deny it!



Here are the **five primary causes** that activate our internal conversations:

1. We talk to ourselves constantly when we have to do something: “Which way should I pick this box up?”
2. Our senses of sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell create information that translates into mental language and internal communication. Notice that, when you smell something you like or don’t like, you actually speak to yourself inside your head. “Whew, what a terrible smell” or “I like that song.”
3. We receive messages from our bodies all the time: “This heartburn is so bad today.”
4. We give messages to our bodies all the time: “Hold it, there’s no toilet nearby.”
5. We comment on what is happening around us or to us. “That guy just cut someone off” or “That salesperson was really helpful.”

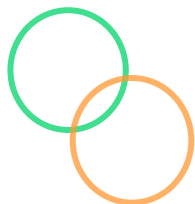
You may or may not share quite a bit of what you think about—work, money, friends, parenting, etc. In fact, it’s normal to not share all of your private conversation about pregnancy and birth with each other.

Think back on your thoughts since you first found out you were going to become a mother or father. Notice that you might not have shared all those thoughts with your partner. Also notice that just thinking back is part of your internal conversation (memories of how you’ve handled things so far or what’s happened!).

Internal dialogues split into two types: Positive Voice and Negative Voice. You are probably familiar with these two and their respective monologues.

“IT HURTS TOO MUCH!” says the Negative Voice.

“What am I feeling? It hurts. I can figure it out. It still hurts. Everyone with me will help me. We can figure it out. IT HURTS. If I breathe and relax, it doesn’t hurt as much!” say the Positive Voice.



The point is, you have an internal conversation composed of two distinct parts. These just get more conscious and focused during the process of giving birth. Whether your birth will include a labor or not, the day of the birth tunnels everyone's attention. The world slips away, and the birthing process rises up and consumes everyone involved.

Over the next few months of pregnancy, practice to find and utilize your Positive Voice when you want to quit, give in, or give up in your daily pregnant life. As you begin to observe your internal dialogue, you'll realize that one or the other voice may be dominant at certain times, creating a monologue, while the other is passive and quiet. At other times, they converse with each other (dialogue). This is the basis for making choices: our personal debate. When things appear difficult or challenging, put your Positive Birthing Behaviors into place by choosing listen to your Positive Voice.

Planned Caesarean

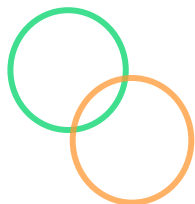
If you're planning a non-laboring Caesarean, of course, some of your internal dialogue will be around that specific issue. However, most of your internal conversations during pregnancy are shared by other pregnant women. You just won't be having an internal conversation about coping with naturally occurring labor pains.

Regardless of your feelings about not laboring, know that your internal voice is just as important in the birth you will have, so read on.

End of Pregnancy

Woman

Since your inner voice will continue to chat away throughout your pregnancy, it's during the last few weeks that you can begin to really discipline what this inner chat is saying, by practicing your Birthing Better Pink Kit skills to the changes your body is making from being pregnant to becoming a birthing body.



Become aware of the periodic tightening of your uterus. These are called Braxton Hicks contractions. They are preparing your uterus to open up even if you've scheduled a non-laboring Caesarean. This means all of us mesh our Birthing Better skills with the changes.

We do this

- out of sheer enjoyment and involvement
- as a way of integrating our skills
- as a way of disciplining our inner dialogue

Other body changes may occur, such as increased backache as your baby moves into your pelvis. Use your inner conversation to choose which skill to use to relieve that discomfort.

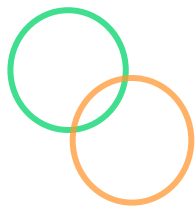
Continue to increase the use of your skills as you get closer to the birthing day. Use your inner voice to direct those skills. Listen to your Negative Voice, as well. Accept it and use positive, self-managing behaviors alongside any anxious thoughts you might experience.

Your job is to train yourself to use your skills, even if you are saying very negative things about how you are feeling or what you're experiencing.

Coach

The end of pregnancy is when you start adjusting your inner dialogue to the changes in your partner's body. Focus your inner voice more on her, less on you. Talk with yourself positively about the changes she is experiencing so that you won't be overwhelmed by your Negative Voice when the "new" is accompanied by pain.

This is also the time to work out any teamwork issues you have. As the birthing woman uses her skills in the end of pregnancy, you get to observe and hear how she is beginning to integrate these skills. This is an important time to increase your practice and communication. Learn together.



During Early Labor

Refresh your memory about the five primary causes of our internal conversations (above).

Woman

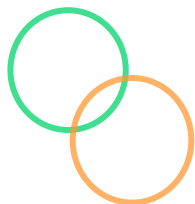
It is during this early part of labor when contractions are not terribly painful that you test out, experience, learn, and put into practice your complex and interwoven Pink Kit skills. You get to play around, investigate as well as develop your relationship to the flow into and out of each contraction. You'll learn about the 5 Phases of contractions (see "The 5 Phases and the Bell-Shaped Curve"). The early part of labor defines your route to self-mastery of your skills if you have sufficiently learned and practiced them.

Naturally occurring adrenaline is activated during this period of early labor, which causes both an alertness and tiredness, as well as nervousness and anticipation. Your internal conversation can be quite speedy or focused, almost to the point of believing you're not having an internal voice. This either/or, positive/negative internal dialogue is very typical of this period.

- Early labor is your putting-into-practice period, no longer the learning-while-practicing period of the end of pregnancy. You now begin to bond your human conscious mind to your body and its physical process.
- **This is the moment in time when all women become cognizant that they do not and cannot control labor!** This is a crucial enlightenment. Because you do not have control over labor, you must use your internal conversation to choose to "respond" to the messages coming through your body from your baby rather than "react" to the sensations and potentially feel out of control.

Coach

Obviously, this is also the time you become much more involved and aware. It's important that you start early with using skills and being aware of the skills your partner is using. It's incredibly difficult to just jump into helping if a woman has



already spent time not coping. Remember that you will never be able to read her mind. You can only listen, watch, and ask questions to learn her rhythm.

During Later Labor

Labor is always a heightened experience. Rarely do other things in life stimulate this heightened bodily event/process, besides extreme sports, performances, tests, emergencies, and high emotions. Notice “emergencies” might stick out, but balance the fear they produce with the high of performances, which are not emergencies. Heightened bodily experiences are hormone-driven. However, you know that what distinguishes a skilled performer/test-taker/etc. is their ability to attune their mental awareness to the challenge at hand and employ their skills in a conscious manner.

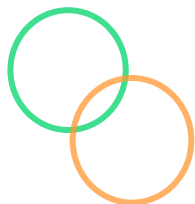
Woman

Once contractions get more intense, painful, large, strong, powerful, forceful, severe, or extreme (yes, there are many words used to define pain during childbirth), your inner voice will get louder. At the same time, your ability to talk tends to reduce.

So what does your Negative Voice do the more you perceive of the sensations as painful? It gets louder. If contractions aren't too painful, this voice can make comments like “It's going to get worse.” If you do perceive of the sensations as painful, your Negative Voice can begin to say things like “Oh, this hurts so much” or “I can't do this” or “OWW.”

No matter what is happening to you or around you, you can use your other voice. This voice will be instructive, telling your body to do the will of your mind. The Positive Voice is your “management mind.” We're all familiar with this voice. It's the one that argues with the other voice when we don't want to get out of bed and go to work or school.

- You can think and choose how to act/ behave when that next contraction comes.
- You can override your Negative Voice when you choose your management mind.



- You don't have to like the experience at all in order to manage, behave, and act well.
- You're doing all of this entirely for yourself and your baby as its mother.

Can you get rid of the Negative Voice?

Not always; however, you can always manage your behavior even when you don't like doing something or when something is happening to you. Childbirth is the ultimate symbolic gateway to parenting. Giving birth is just a brief moment that brings us face-to-face with some of the many unpleasant moments in the years of parenting that we can neither quit nor walk away from.

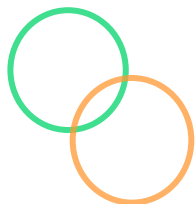
By acknowledging the Negative Voice, yet applying our management mind, we accomplish two things:

1. An immediate sense of meeting the challenge.
2. A foundation for positive lifetime memories of your own ability to rise to the challenge and work with a situation not always pleasurable. In other words, "I DID it!"

Cracking a private joke

One woman having her second baby thoroughly went around her pelvic clock between contractions, softening at 1, 2, 3 o'clock. That's how she interpreted her clock. She could really feel the tissue inside her bony pelvis relaxing. This softening felt good in both her body and her mind.

However, whenever a new contraction started, her Negative Voice would come in and say, "Why did you do that?" That was a funny voice and her private joke. She had no time to answer back. She only had time to then use her Directed Breathing, staying open, softening around her cervix, and chanting her mantra, "Open, open, open." She knew she was succeeding, because her cervix opened very quickly, which meant very intense contractions. Yet at the end of each contraction, her mind led her back to softening inside her pelvic clock. Then the cycle repeated as soon as another contraction started.



She knew she was doing positive things, but her Negative Voice never stopped talking to her and constantly reminding her how intense the contraction pain was. Still, her labor progressed really quickly. She knew she had to do what was effective and proactive, even if she didn't really like the sensations.

Woman

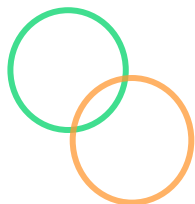
The best time to start to resolve the Negative Voice is as soon as you recognize it. It can come and go throughout labor. Sometimes, you think you're handling the sensations, then the labor notches up a peg, you begin to lose it, and there goes the voice in your head. As soon as you notice you're talking negatively to yourself, acknowledge it, put into place more of your skills, and reach out to your coach to really work with you, one inhale and one exhale at a time.

Coach

During labor, your self-talk can either help or hinder you, especially if you believe that your woman's pain is threatening her or your child. The MOST important reason you are learning these Pink Kit skills is so you can identify the naturally occurring, intense pain of labor contractions without confusing them with a "problem" (see "The Whys and Hows of Pain"). If your negative self-talk ever convinces you there is a problem, please ask your birth professional. They've been at lots of births compared to your one-time experience.

Your Pink Kit skills are meant to help men understand and feel their body in the same way women do. Forget the bump on her belly or your lack of. Concentrate on growing your self-awareness of your body. Then become fascinated with her body and how similar they are. Once you connect her body and yours around this incredibly distinctive period of your life, you will find much of your negative self-talk calms down. You will feel skilled, and using your skills is of the essence. No one can do your job but you.

A large part of your internal conversation during the intense part of labor, just like your partner's, becomes more focused on each moment of the contraction and time between. Your partner's internal conversation is much more about how she is acting/



behaving/sounding/doing, because she is actively doing the activity. As an outsider (not because you're a man), you observe and hear her.

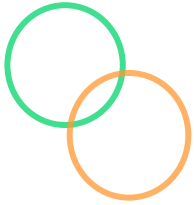
This means your self-talk voice will be the "assessor." The assessor evaluates whether she is coping with the naturally occurring pain of contractions. Medical pain relief is used to dull the pain for those women who don't have the coping skills. Women who are not coping feel and act out of control. It frightens many men to see a woman "suffer" in labor, but that only comes from a lack of skills. Remember your birthing partner does NOT have to like the pain. Your job is to help her cope so that she remembers her good self-managing capabilities.

If you have really learned, practiced, and then used your skills, you will be more able to be the deep, determined, capable, strong, nurturing man who can reassure your partner that she can do it. The greater your communication with your partner based on her using her skills is, the greater will be your ability as a team to help her manage the pain. If she chooses to use medical pain relief, continue to use your skills as a commitment to remain connected to your baby.

So, you could have two voices:

- **Fear:** "Oh my god, she's in so much pain, there must be a problem."
- **Admiration/determination:** "Gosh, she's working so hard, and I'm going to help her every moment, she's amazing."

In labor, work with her every single moment, every single moment, every single moment. As you work through this activity together, keep checking in with each other's internal voices. This honesty with each other during birth can become the basis for how you parent together.



Exercises for Your Inner Voice

Both of you need to do all these exercises and share your results with each other. Remember, you can't read each other's mind so verbalizing what's going on inside you is especially crucial for these skills!

EXERCISE #1

How much are you aware of your Negative Voice—the one inside your head that says “I can't,” “I give up,” “I don't feel like it,” “I hate this,” “I quit,” etc.?

For the next few days, pay attention to your negative self-talk throughout the day. Then have the courage to change your management of a situation that is stimulating that negative self-talk.

In other words, follow the ancient Chinese saying, “If you can't change the situation, change your attitude.” With Birthing Better Pink Kit skills, we say, “If you can't change the situation, use your skills to make it bearable or better.”

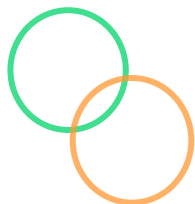
EXERCISE #2

- 1) Intentionally talk negatively to yourself right now.
- 2) Then use your Types #1 and #2 breathing (see “Breathing”) for a whole minute.
- 3) **Keep talking negatively**, but just keep doing your good breathing.

Regardless of whether you have a Negative Voice, you can continue to use your good Pink Kit skills. Then you'll remember the experience in two ways:

- You might not have always liked it.
- But you managed yourself very well!

Is it essential to like something to manage it well? No.



EXERCISE #3

Do the same as above, but change the skills. Instead of breathing, you'll use a relaxation skill (see "Soft Pelvis").

- 1) Talk negatively to yourself.
- 2) Relax around your pelvic clock.

EXERCISE #4

Take a Doer/Receiver role exchange for this.

- 1) **Receiver:** Talk negatively to yourself.
- 2) **Doer:** Talk through the list of pelvic places from "Communication," giving your partner the "relax/soften/pause" script.
- 3) **Receiver:** Notice your Negative Voice does not necessarily go away. You just override it with your positive behavior.

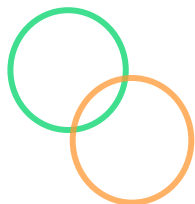
Woman

Here are some suggestions that you might want to write down or memorize. Carry them around the next few weeks and repeat them. Imprint them into your brain.

In other words, choose your Positive Voice.

- √ *I don't LIKE this, but I CAN manage this. I have the skills.*
- √ *My partner is right here, helping me every step of the way.*
- √ *I know women have always done this. When it's over, I'm going to feel really proud of myself.*
- √ *I know I can, I know I can, I know I can...I knew I could!*

Find other words and sentences that work for you. Tell them to your partner, write them down, take them with you, and USE them in labor to meet the challenge.



Coach

You need to recognize your own Negative Voice as well as the persistent one your birthing partner might have. Men have not been taught how to really help in childbirth. Many men cannot discern the difference between fear and a Negative Voice, but you need to. Read *The Gift of Fear* by Gavin de Becker for a hard-hitting book that will help you distinguish between anxiety and fear. Anxiety, often mistaken for fear, is crippling.

You might find your Negative Voice saying

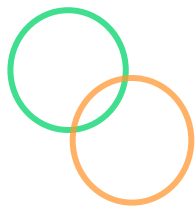
- *I can't stand to see her in such pain!*
- *I'll never get her pregnant again.*
- *I just wish this was over.*
- *There must be a problem!*
- *Why can't the doctor do something?*

If you and your partner truly learn your Birthing Better Pink Kit skills, together you will make clearer observations during the whole birth process and be able to respond rather than react. Fear is a gift when it's used well. Even with medical assessments, monitoring, and procedures, the birth process continues, so you can choose your Positive Voice to create positive messages that you say to yourself:

- √ *Goodness, I have such admiration for her.*
- √ *She seems to be in a lot of pain, so I'm going to dig deep and help her accomplish this.*
- √ *Women have done this for eternity; no wonder they are so strong.*

And you can use your Positive Voice to create positive messages you give to your partner, too:

- √ *What can I do to help?*
- √ *Breathe with me; I'm here for you.*
- √ *Relax inside your pelvic clock.*
- √ *You're really using your breath well.*



Hitting the Wall

Woman

No one likes to reach their limits of endurance. The problem is that what we reach is often the limits of our *perceived* endurance. This is when we are listening to our Negative Voice too much. In other words, you've learned to quit at some point. This is normal. For some people, it's sooner. For others, it's later.

Sometimes, we can't be bothered and think we've done well enough. Other times we keep going, trying to get the task done, but eventually run up against our lack of skills. Usually, hitting a wall, stopping, giving in or up has to do with fatigue and a lack of skills.

This is normal and is best dealt with in two steps:

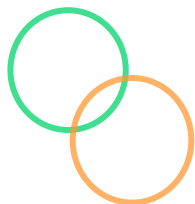
- 1) Honor the episode, but know it will pass. Rest, cry, be irritable, drink water, get some sleep, get up and move around, get a cuddle—do anything necessary to honor your emotional and physical feelings of being overwhelmed.
- 2) Then get on with it. It is your responsibility to help your coach to help you by using your common language, whether verbal or non-verbal.

This is not the time to get stuck in your familiar habits of irritability, tears, anger, or withdrawal. Labor is one of those life experiences when we can reach beyond ourselves into our greatness. We can learn to go a bit further, be more accepting of what we don't like, and still get on with it.

Use childbirth as a way to become a more willing person, and help your partner help you to do that.

A light-bulb moment

"It took me three labors to realize that I was trying to use labor to solve all the other issues in life. No wonder my labors were horrible!"



“Halfway through my last birth, a light bulb went off in my head — ‘I just have to get on with this labor.’ I stopped all my whining and anger and started breathing and relaxing. I liberated myself. I made a choice that I’ve used ever since.”

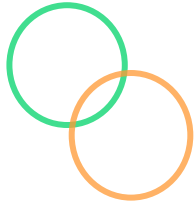
Coach

The best approach to getting a woman beyond her shut-down phase is to not let her get there in the first place; stay on top of her Negative Voice so it doesn’t take over. But when your partner is finding labor hard, watch and listen. It’s the woman’s reaction to what she is feeling internally that gives you the biggest clues to how to help her. During intense contractions, the change in pain can occur between one inhalation and another, so enjoy using your innate masculine skills to be a great observer and then helper.

If you miss the exact point when labor notches up, don’t feel bad; the changes are sometimes hard to spot even for the woman.

Remember these ways to get you both back on track:

- Ask questions. Try to wait until the space between contractions, then simply ask her to help you find out what she wants. Help her to really stay in The Now between contractions.
- If she’s really struggling, acknowledge the struggle. Often, it’s just that too much energy has built up internally, and she has to let it out. You can say, “Let it out. Shout or cry for a bit. Now, let’s get back to doing the work together.”
- Tell her that you can see it’s hard work. Remember that labor becomes VERY intense. If she begins to say, “It’s too hard” or “I can’t,” first affirm her feelings.
- Then reaffirm that
 - * she can do this,
 - * this is the last part—soon, she’ll be pushing and will feel better,
 - * you’re going to help her at every moment, and
 - * if she needs specific help, she just needs to let you know what.



No woman intentionally loses control in labor or freaks out. And women absolutely don't like to be criticized while they are doing their best to ride the biggest wave they've ever experienced, knowing there will also be a next one and a next one.

Whenever we retreat into our shut-down habits, we do so because we are frustrated and unable to resolve a situation. If she is shutting down or resisting your suggestions, remember that there's a fine line between encouraging and pushing to succeed, and maybe she feels you've crossed that line.

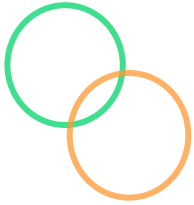
You must help her find herself. As a support person, you are there to serve the birthing woman and not get reactive. Almost the worst thing a partner or support person can do is get sucked into the emotions. Your job is to help her get on with it. Drop back into the skills you know, encourage her to put her reactions aside and **JUST DO THE WORK**. Encourage her to dig deeper, let go, surrender, accept, get on with it. Sometimes, a coach just needs to tell the woman to "Get it together!"

Beating Precedence

How many of us are aware of our self-talk that comes from past experiences? If we've had unpleasant experiences, we often try to suppress them or find ourselves constantly dwelling on them.

Childbirth can stimulate our weaknesses AND our previously used strengths. Both manifest in our self-talk! If we cry, whine, scream, get angry, swear, or become totally silent, we do so in our heads as well as out loud. If we become focused and rise above the pain with great management skills, this also happens both externally and internally.

All top athletes know that the more they visualize themselves in their events, the more confident and competent they feel and act. Top athletes don't visualize only about winning and receiving their medals—they actually see every moment of their events in their heads. It's like an internal choreographed dance. This internal imaging is also a form of self-communication.



Can both of you visualize the type of labor you want, how you want to act, what you want your partner to do with you, and so on?

This is different from thinking about your Birth Plan. For that, you also have to make choices: whether you prefer to birth at home, get into water, have special music, or use gas or an epidural. But regardless of what sort of birth situation you “choose,” you can still find yourself not managing your labor because you don’t have the skills to choose how you respond to contractions or how you help her respond.

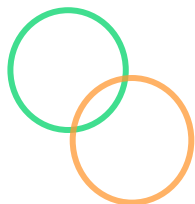
Visualize yourself managing your labor, particularly the intense part, and see how you will behave. You can put positive birthing behaviors into your body and mind that will prevent or reduce the likelihood of your negative habits from taking over when labor becomes intense. You can imagine the period of early labor when contractions aren’t too intense and see yourself using your new skills. Then you can picture how you will use your skills through intense contractions. If you don’t like the picture that comes into your mind, redo it, refine it, and do it better the next time, all within your mind.

Labor is a great opportunity to exercise the best of ourselves and come to peace with those thoughts that come up when we feel unable or incapable: hitting the wall. We don’t always know how we can choose how we sound and what we do, though, so here is an Awareness exercise to help you know how to overcome your typical Negative Voice. This exercise is for both of you.

EXERCISE: BEATING PRECEDENCE

Everyone has difficult experiences in life that challenge them to their physical, emotional, or mental limits. Recall one of your own such experiences. Think about how you coped, or didn’t cope, or how you could have coped better if you had had the skills.

Then go one step further, because the purpose of this awareness is not to feel stuck in unpleasantness.



- 1) Take one difficult experience that you handled well, and think about why you did so and how you used good management skills. Identify **specifically** what skills you used.
- 2) Then take one difficult experience that you didn't handle very well, and mentally redo it using any better skills you have now.

"If you think you can, you can. If you think you can't, you're right." Mary Kay Ash

Woman

Remember, no matter how difficult your life has been, you have survived. By using your management mind, you can overcome your Negative Voice and manage your way through your future birth experience so that, when you look back as you are asked to do in this Awareness Exercise, you will look back knowing you did a good job.

Coach

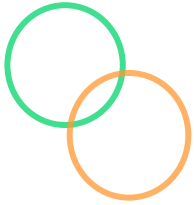
Discuss some of the difficult experiences she has remembered, and, if you were involved in them, add your private perception. Decide together how you can best use these experiences to make certain you can help your partner put her best management skills into place.

Change the behavior

"My wife had a habit: she always started any task with huge energy but had trouble finishing. Even when she went tramping, she'd tire just before the summit. We'd try everything to keep her energy up, but she'd get irritable with me, and I'd end up going to the summit alone and waiting there. She'd get to the top eventually, often in a foul mood. I knew she was annoyed with herself, but she just couldn't change her behavior.

"I knew she'd also handle the labor like this, which made me a bit nervous, so I talked to her about my concerns. She didn't have a clue how she could change her behavior, and sure enough, she gave up right at the end of 1st Stage and didn't want to use any of her skills. Fortunately, she was soon pushing and didn't have much choice except to be involved.

"Within six months of the birth, she was totally changed. She was able to see this behavior in



a different light, and she realized she didn't want to keep it. After that, finishing a task or reaching that peak became a high point for her and gave her a great sense of accomplishment. Since then, we've had two more babies. At the next birth, she did much better and let me help when we had a few uncertain moments. For our last baby, she was unexpectedly at home alone and felt confident through the whole experience."