

PROGRESSION

Staying in The NOW



Pink **KIT**
METHOD[®]

Staying in The Now: Mindfulness, Flow, and Attitude

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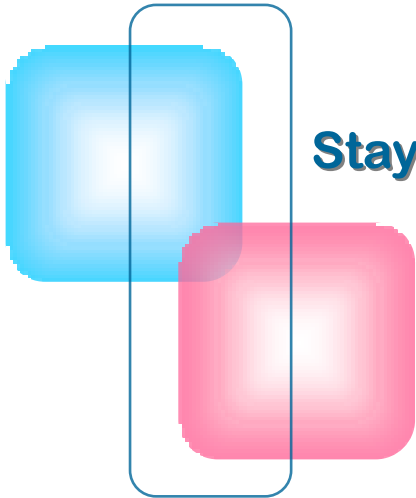
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Birthing Better with The Pink Kit Method®
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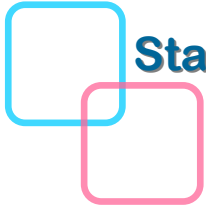


Staying in The Now: Mindfulness, Flow, and Attitude

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Staying in the Now: Mindfulness, Flow, and Attitude

Time

Time has different dimensions: the past, present, and future. We always live in the present, never in the past or future, but our human minds often spend more time in both the past and future than in the present.

Think about it. What enables you to have not one single thought about something that has happened or something that will happen? Only lots of concentrated effort and your full attention.

This is the story of a first-time father and how he handled Time's dimensions during his baby's birth.

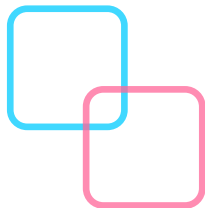
The empowerment of a dentist appointment

"I went overseas to have eleven crowns. This meant I had to sit in the dentist's chair for six to eight hours a day for ten days. I had a lot of time to think about all the Pink Kit skills we were learning and how to apply my skills as a husband and about-to-be father.

"I noticed lots of thoughts going through my head while I had to lie perfectly still, with the unpleasant sounds of the drill pulling on my nerve endings.

"This is what I figured out. Somehow, I had made a choice to have my teeth done. This meant I had to be obligated to spending this length of time doing what was required. (I made this analogy about my wife: she chose to become pregnant, and she was preparing to do the activity of giving birth because birth was going to happen whether she was terrified, peaceful, or somewhere in between.)

"I realized I couldn't get out of the experience, even though I hated it, felt impatient, felt restless, and often felt I just couldn't keep going. I knew my wife could feel these emotions as well.



“So, I spent my time thinking about how to manage my time. I had several choices, such as to focus on other parts of my body. That worked for a while, then I had to acknowledge my feelings of restlessness.

“Time still passed along. I noticed that, when I had negative emotions, time stood still, and every moment seemed extended. If I focused on my past experiences, that also made time seem forever. So did focusing on the future. What worked best was to focus on the present. It was hard, but I was surprised that the ten days actually passed very quickly. I just kept doing the Pink Kit breathing and going through specific parts of my body to continually relax and soften.

“Paying attention at the moment to my body and using my mind to continually relax, like scanning my body inside and out, made a huge difference. I also recovered quickly each day.

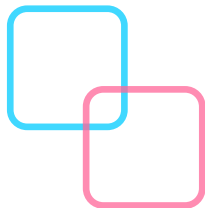
“Now I knew that I could really help my wife during the birth.”

The father went on to explain what happened in their labor.

“For hours, in the early part of labor, my wife was fine. She said the contractions weren’t painful at all. They seemed to last for only 20 seconds or so and came 7 minutes apart. We discussed whether she should consciously use some of her Pink Kit skills, such as the Pelvic Clock. She’d been using them more throughout the days before labor started but got a bit confused because labor didn’t seem to be very much of a bother. However, we decided she should try scanning her body and relaxing internal tension.

“She noticed that she felt more involved when she used the skills, especially right after a contraction and during some of the space between. She also continued to pay attention to how each contraction felt, what it was doing inside her, and where tension arrived.

“She discovered that tension came back into specific places again and again, and new tensions arrived because of a contraction. She paid particular attention to making certain her sacrum felt mobile.



“My role at this point was to listen to what she was learning, chat, and give her massages when she wanted. Mostly, we just went about our business, going to the movies, taking walks, baths, and naps.

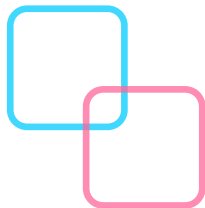
“Eventually, the contractions changed. This was obvious. They became closer, longer, and much more intense. It sort of happened quite quickly, which surprised both of us, particularly since these light contractions had lasted about 15 hours. Now, we were in the middle of the night, and suddenly the contractions were lasting a minute long and three minutes apart and were very intense. She began to struggle even using her Pink Kit skills, but we worked together, trying to find what worked.

“She gathered herself together for a while quite well, but then the contractions got more intense, and only an hour had passed. Then she started to slip again in her ability to cope. This was kind of a frightening time for both of us, because we began to doubt that the Pink Kit skills worked for really painful contractions. We tried a bunch of different things that kind of worked, but not as effectively as we would have liked. But she gallantly gathered herself again, and I began to think about my dental marathon.

“Then she slipped further and had more of a struggle, because the contractions got even more intense. I realized that we had to get very serious about NOW. Only two hours had passed since the contractions were very manageable. But here we were, and this is where we really, really discovered the depth and breadth of the Pink Kit skills. We worked with every phase of each contraction. We paid attention to the small details of my wife’s body positions, making certain each contraction had a bell-shaped curve, that every inhale and exhalation was well-directed and useful to her energy and relaxation.

“We orchestrated the experience as it happened so that it was manageable and so very powerful. Our world was each other, each breath, and each moment. Most of our communication was non-verbal, touch and nods. When she felt tension in a specific part, she’d touch it, and my touch seemed to help her relax even deeper.

“Time meant nothing. Our one issue was to make certain my wife could cope moment to moment with any pain she felt AND to make certain the labor progressed, so that our baby’s



birth was not delayed because of any internal tension.

“Something then changed in her breathing, very rapidly. She started to make these grunting sounds. It took us two contractions to realize she was pushing, or her body was bearing down involuntarily.

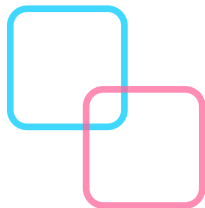
“We had been diligent with the internal work. I was able to check inside during a contraction and could feel our baby coming down. My wife reached down and began to massage places on her vagina that felt a bit tight.

“It’s like she woke up, got really organized, and decided exactly what position would work for her. She then would slightly adjust during or after each contraction.

“Our moment-to-moment, in the NOW was even more heightened. Within 30 minutes, our daughter was born, and our NOW was even more and more focused. It wasn’t until my wife had delivered the afterbirth, cleaned up, eaten, drank, and gotten into bed with our daughter all rugged that the world around us came back into focus.

“I have got to say, my dentistry experience prepared me to remain totally involved with the birth of our daughter. I felt more like a man, more human, ready to be a parent, a much more committed partner.

“Of all the Pink Kit skills we learned, it was knowing how to remain present in the present time that helped me apply all the skills we had practiced and learned. This was a WOW experience I’d do again in a minute. In fact, I could help any other man to learn. I could help any laboring woman cope. I’m not a doctor or midwife, but I’m really good at my job as a labor coach.”



The Now

Now you know from the Birth Story above that all your Birthing Better Pink Kit skills will be used to deal with

- the natural pain of labor contractions,
- the efforts of your baby to come down, through, and out the pregnant body, and
- the moment-to-moment passage of time.

When you are in the midst of the activity of any birth, it is not a past or present occurrence: it is a NOW experience and demands your complete attention. Even if the activity is a trip to hospital, waiting to be prepped, and surgery, staying in The Now in the birth of your child is essential.

There are three very important facets of being in the present, or staying in The Now:

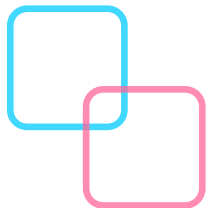
- Mindfulness
- Flow
- Attitude

Keep these three concepts in mind as you learn and practice all your Birthing Better Pink Kit skills; that way, you will perfect them and develop competency.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the art of merging your awareness with your actions at any moment. Each moment within any experience then becomes an end in itself, as you give your full attention to each moment until the activity is complete. Sound impossible? Well, it *is* difficult.

We often prefer our mind to be elsewhere when we don't particularly like what we're doing, or when we want to avoid thinking about something. We daydream, space out, avoid the thought, or just plain don't pay attention.



Let's think about mindfulness in regards to driving your car.

Notice how often you separate your mind from your actions. Do you find part of your mind thinking about other things? Have you ever gotten into an accident or had a near miss from a mind wander? Have you ever reprimanded yourself for spacing out while driving? Do you text while driving and notice this takes your attention from driving?

Look at other activities in regards to Mindfulness.

- How often does your mind wander when you take a walk or while doing your job?
- Have you ever missed what another person just said because your mind is elsewhere?

Most of us are not accustomed to keeping our thoughts and actions together.

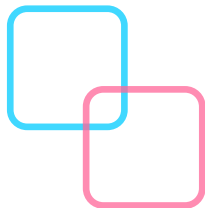
With that being said, you still often do exercise mindfulness in your daily life; you just don't always know it, acknowledge it, or know how to maintain the mindfulness.

Birth will require Mindfulness of both of you as expectant family. There is absolutely nothing else happening when birth is happening, so Mindfulness is something best learned and grown.

Here are a couple ways to start

MINDFULNESS EXERCISE: BOTH PARENTS

- 1) Begin to notice when your mind is completely focused on what you are doing.
- 2) Whenever you notice you have lost focus, bring your mind back, and then notice how long it is before it wanders off again.



Mindfulness for birthing women

You can hear mindfulness in many Birth Stories:

"I had to shut everything else out to concentrate/focus."

"I focused on each inhale and each exhale."

"After the contraction finished, then I could talk."

As the natural pain of labor increases, this drives you deeper into yourself and Mindfulness. It is always the pain of labor that causes women to become uncomfortable both emotionally and physically.

When pain crosses the coping threshold, women without skills often find this period of giving birth very unpleasant. You'll hear them say:

"I knew this would last forever."

"I thought I would die."

"I just wanted it to stop."

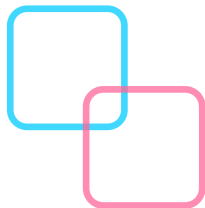
These are all comments about Mindfulness, but they are quite unpleasant. When women have skills, they express the same pain this way.

"Everything was like in slow motion. I was so aware."

"My husband could read my mind."

"I knew exactly where my baby was and what was happening to me."

The latter part of pregnancy has an old saying, "The larger your uterus grows, the more your mind goes." As you become more pregnant, the mundane world becomes less significant, and preparing for birth (making your nest) becomes your entire focus. Mindfulness becomes a natural part of your physiological preparation for giving birth. This is a good time to learn how to use this wonderful trait.



While giving birth, your mind becomes acutely aware. Women without skills don't know how to use their Mindfulness. In other words, they haven't learned how to connect the higher brain center to their body through awareness and choices.

These women will get through birth because 100% of pregnant women will give birth one way or another. More often than not, though, they become fretful, and their Birth Story sounds like this:

"I wanted to stop for lunch and then come back, but I couldn't."

"The pain drove me to distraction."

"I was afraid every time a new contraction started."

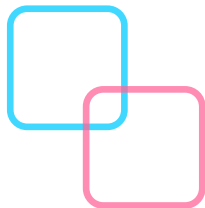
Keep in mind that, by developing Mindfulness, the same pain can elicit these mindful responses:

- Your attention narrows (*"I didn't want anyone to talk to me during a contraction. I had to concentrate." "I used each of the 5 Phases of each contraction to implement one or more of my skills."*).
- The past and future clearly do not exist (*"I didn't think ahead to the next contraction. I just worked with what was happening at the moment." "I focused entirely on being relaxed everywhere inside my body."*)
- The NOW is all that remains (*"Time did not exist." "With every exhalation, I relaxed."*)

Exercise Mindfulness as you practice your Birthing Better Pink Kit skills, and begin to live your daily life more mindfully, as well. As you get better at doing so, you will be able to recognize and choose this state of awareness in birth and choose which skills work well in the moment.

Mindfulness for coaching dads

As a husband, partner, friend, or relative who will be the birth coach, you also must become aware of how to exercise your Mindfulness. Use multiple examples in your



life to practice. This is important, because a woman in labor is very aware when anyone turns their attention elsewhere.

The first step to your Mindfulness comes as you learn the observation and listening skills, coupled with the breathing and relaxation skills. If you treat birth preparation only as “her business,” you will become disengaged when she needs you, which would be the exact opposite of mindful.

The next step to Mindfulness is simple: do not go into the birth tired. A woman shouldn’t either, but the birth hormones (adrenaline and endorphins) will override her tiredness for many hours. You have to learn to pace yourself.

Many men experience profound relief that their job as birth coach can be full of practical skills rather than merely emotive. Your wife/partner doesn’t need your heightened emotions. She needs your focus. She needs your Mindfulness.

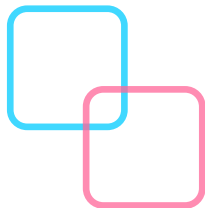
As a parent and partner, you need it as well.

Don’t lose focus

A young couple was in labor with their first child. They had a very deep and intimate relationship. As the baby’s head had stretched the woman’s vagina fully open (“crowning”), the husband was awash with love and joy. He said to his wife, “I LOVE YOU SO MUCH.” She turned her head and replied, “Love has nothing to do with this.” Everyone cracked up. She was in an ultimate state of Mindfulness, aware of every sensation and every subtle response she made to each moment of sensation. He, on the other hand, had moved from helping her to being emotive, and that wasn’t what she needed at the time.

Mindfulness for VBAC parents

Mindfulness is vitally important to your VBAC success. A VBAC should not be entirely based on ideology or a belief that, if medical care hadn’t been imposed on you, the previous birth would have been fine.



If, in this coming birth, there is a medical concern with which you agree, continue to use your skills in a mindful manner so you never, ever leave the birth of your baby with negative feelings. Being connected to the whole birth process is what so many VBAC women did not feel in their last birth. Do not repeat that.

As the birth of your baby should never be something that undermines you, your relationships, or your parenting abilities, so should having a surgical birth not be a bottom line for personal shame, blame, and guilt. It is not, by any means, the worst way for a birth to turn out or the worst way to start a child's life.

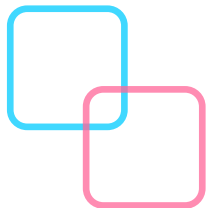
Take a look in the newspaper, watch TV, or listen to the radio, and become empathetic to the millions of women who birth while their children are starving, in war, kidnapped as slaves, working from dawn to dusk.

Part of your Mindfulness has to be a resolution about any negative attitudes you have to modern medical care. This message comes to you from thousands of other women who turned their Mindfulness to the skills they needed to learn and away from their emotional stories. Life can be much worse than having a bad medical experience.

Birth is always sacred, no matter where, with whom, or what is happening. You just have to use your Mindfulness to direct your intentions and actions to you and your baby's own process. Do not expect a birth to be perfect or even good in order for you to be a fulfilled, capable, and self-empowered human being.

DO make a huge personal commitment to be in the NOW and exercise the art of Mindfulness.

Birth Is Now
Birth Is Moment To Moment
Birth Requires You to Stay Present
Birth Requires Your Mindfulness



Through Mindfulness, Get Into the Flow

Mindfulness is the art of being totally in the present time, The Now. When you are bringing your attention and actions together at each moment, you remain conscious of The Now. “Flow” is when you string one moment together with the next moment and the next.

If you have been in labor before, you know that, regardless of what is happening to you or around you, the labor is an ongoing process. There is absolutely no escape. You are forced by the physiological imperative of the efforts your child makes to be born. Do not be afraid of this. Although it’s a challenge, birth is a huge gift of procreation, given to women.

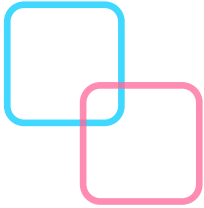
According to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, who wrote an article in 1975 in the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, **Flow** becomes possible when we act with total involvement, awareness and action merge, and action follows upon action.

Keeping Csikszentmihalyi’s definition in mind, this is exactly how to use our Pink Kit skills: “act with total involvement” and use your skills as actions that follow another skill’s action. In other words, each inhalation used with the intention of opening your pelvis, and every exhalation used with the intention to soften and relax inside your pelvis, can be one such set of actions following actions.

Flow most commonly occurs when what you are doing is familiar and well-practiced. (“*I just repeatedly used the skills I had practiced, and that consistency really kept me on top of the painful contractions.*”)

The “doing” then becomes so familiar that it appears to be purely spontaneous. (“*All the skills made sense; they seemed to come automatically, although I knew I wouldn’t have had a clue without practicing them over and over.*”)

Time often passes quickly. (“*I couldn’t believe I had been in labor for 15 hours; it went by so quickly.*”)



Flow is rarely experienced when a situation demands a response that is clearly beyond the limits of a person's skill and talent. (*"I didn't have any skills and didn't have a clue what to do. I just prayed it would be over soon."*)

For both a birthing woman and her birth coach, the qualities that accompany being in the Flow include

- **mental calmness** (*"My focus gave me a sense that everything was alright."*),
- **low anxiety** (*"Working with my baby's efforts to be born was wonderful. I never felt anxious for myself or baby. I knew we were both fine."*),
- **alertness** (*"By using our skills, we felt so alive, so powerful, so aware, so competent."*), and
- **focus** (*"I had a choice at every moment which skill to use and how to use it."*).

Flow Is a Learned Skill

MINDFULNESS/FLOW EXERCISE: BOTH PARENTS

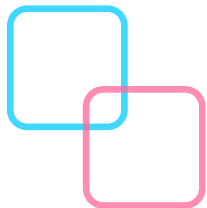
Do this exercise both separately and together.

- 1) Choose any action/activity during your day. Pay attention to how your body is doing that action.
- 2) Use your awareness to notice any tension in your body as you continue doing this activity.
- 3) Then use your mind to relax the tension as you continue to do the action/activity.
- 4) Remember to breathe throughout.
- 5) Congratulate yourself for a moment of Mindfulness and being in the Flow.

Repeat this 10 times each day until the birth.

Attitude

Mindfulness and Flow are only positive when each partner makes them so. They can be lost very quickly when a negative Attitude arises. Both women and men fear the

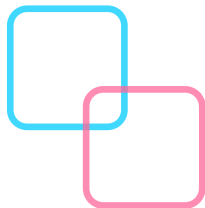


negative emotions that can occur in birth. Don't fear your negative thoughts or emotions. You can have plenty of them and still manage the situation very, very well. It's not your attitude you'll remember about birth; it's your behavior. (*"I could think good thoughts and behave well, or I could think bad thoughts and behave badly. This was a no-brainer."*)

The difference between having a positive or negative Attitude is in what you do with what is happening. Often, you'll hear women say, *"They' did this to me; therefore, I lost it."* Yes, there are so many things that can happen in pregnancy and childbirth that you will not anticipate, and negativity can happen to either or both of you. We all hit the wall from time to time, but that should inspire you to learn and develop new skills rather than give up.

Birth is not the time or place to fall into the "I can't." It is the time for both of you to take care of yourself and your teammate. This is the true test of your team and yourselves as partners. By maintaining a good Attitude, you are much more likely to be able to get into the Flow and remain there. You are more able to maintain your Mindfulness, because your mind is clear and not fogged by fatigue or other negative emotions.

- Check your energy level. Do something to increase your positive energy and reduce your negative energy: sleep, eat, laugh, drink water, hug, take a shower, breathe deeply.
- Discipline. Develop a calm, quiet mind, and place that calmness into your body.
- If you find your mind gallops with lots of negative thoughts, just observe the presence of those thoughts. Choose to turn your focus to creating positive responses, relaxing your body, and getting on with the job.
- Focus your attention on the present moment and what you can do right now to relax, rather than on the past or future.
- Actively focus your attention on your task, not on the outside world. A good way is to control your eyes. Either shut them, or focus on something or someone.



Giving birth is a very compressed period of time, so it requires lots of concentration, much like a marathon or flute performance. The success of your Birthing Better Pink Kit skills should be encouraged by the thousands upon thousands of Pink Kit families who were determined to keep using their skills no matter what was happening to or around them. They maintained a positive Attitude even when the unexpected or unpleasant was occurring. This is a crucial choice both of you make moment to moment.

As a parent, you will have many negative emotions, thoughts, and even a bad attitude over the next 20 years. Always honor the negative, and act in the positive.

A last trick to change your attitude when things get tough

The Fascination Principle (Aaron McLoughlin, 2000) is a technique you can use to resolve the overwhelmed or "stuck" feeling during childbirth. To use this technique, you must recognize that you don't feel great, and that something has to change for the positive. Practice this before birth with daily frustrations, irritations, annoyances, and crappy moments that pop up.

ATTITUDE EXERCISE: BOTH PARENTS

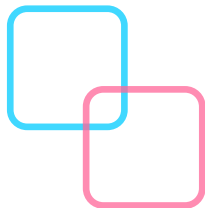
Coaches, practice and follow the 3 Steps that lead to the 3 Responses. Women, use this same principle in your thinking process. You are the primary person responsible for not getting stuck in a bad Attitude or getting unstuck once you're in one.

1) Become aware of the problem→Acknowledge the problem

For example, your wife/partner begins to tell you the contractions now hurt after hours of relatively painless ones. First, acknowledge what she says, but you can't stop there.

2) Encourage your curiosity→Become actively fascinated with the problem

You might ask her or think through what skill might help right now. If she refuses one skill, suggest something else.



3) Imagine/create a possible solution → Secure a resolution

Work together to find what skill/s work in that moment and use the skill/s until you need to use the process all over again.

You will use this process many times during birth AND during parenting AND in your relationship with your partner.

Enjoying Your Self-Aware Birth

After your birth, you will want to talk about your experience again and again, both the very positive aspects, and the things that didn't quite go the way you'd have liked. This is natural.

As you discuss and clarify the way you handled yourselves and everything that happened to and around you, you will grow and develop a greater understanding of this incredible experience! You will know what you did and didn't do, and what you will do differently if you do it again. It is a wonderful process of blending the viewpoints from your different roles. Enjoy this time.

Life changes after a birth. However, these particular skills of Mindfulness, being in the Flow, Attitude, and the Fascination Principle will find a place in your lives as partners and parents. In fact, if you've already had children, you know this. These qualities of mind developed when your second set of hands grew! Without doubt, the more mindful and capable you are during the activity of birth, the more likely you will develop those same qualities in your years as parents. To achieve these qualities, you need to practice and integrate the skills you've learned in the Pink Kit resources so they become second nature or can be accessed when required.

When you labor, each contraction is independent. Each rest period is independent. Each nanosecond of labor is The Now. And The Now is when you use your skills. Instead of expecting a "perfect birth," strive for a more mindful, more conscious, more involved, and more capable birth. Be pleased with your accomplishment.