

TYPE OF BIRTH



Trauma and Birth Stress



Pink **KIT**
METHOD[®]

TABS: Trauma and Birth Stress

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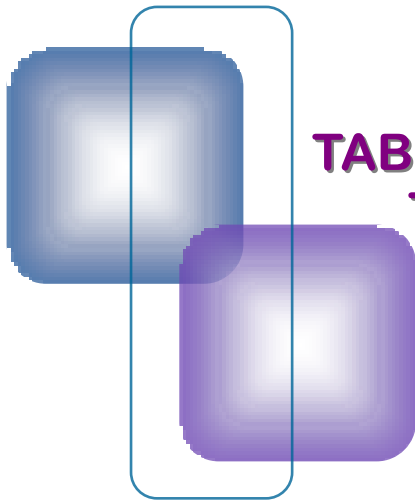
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Birthing Better with The Pink Kit Method®
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TABS: Trauma and Birth Stress

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Trauma Is Not the Same as Feeling Traumatized

This resource is for both of you.

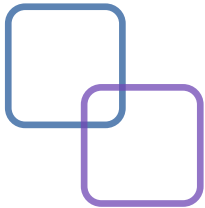
TABS, the common acronym for Trauma and Birth Stress, can include having had a traumatic birth experience as well as the experience of postnatal depression that may follow a traumatic or non-traumatic birth. Unfortunately, this syndrome has become more common, or at least more recognized/reported.

All of us can remember traumatic experiences, and most of them do not leave us traumatized. Only some do. In the same way, there are many families whose birth stories are tragic, yet the physical or emotional trauma does not linger in their lives. TABS only becomes an issue when the person or people involved feel traumatized and the process of healing does not take place within a reasonable amount of time.

Grieving, being angry, feeling incomplete, confused, depressed, and hopeless are all valid emotional expressions when working through traumatic situations. But they become a concern when they aren't resolved. The purpose of this specific resource is to pass on what Pink Kit families have discovered, both the reasons for their traumatic experience and the steps they took to heal.

There are many books that can help you through your healing process from TABS. Read some, and do the work suggested. Also, please work with health professionals in both conventional and natural health. In fact, do everything you can to heal. Use your faith and family to find a way forward. Do not settle for having a life of bitterness, fear, anger, or depression from a birthing experience.

Your Pink Kit is one resource that has been used successfully by thousands of families who experienced diverse types of birth trauma.



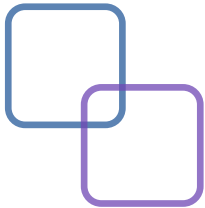
Modern Societies

There is no doubt the human race is splitting in two: those who still live in traditional (developing) societies and those who live in modern (developed) societies. There has also been a huge change in perception with the change in lifestyle.

Here are some reasons people in modern societies are prone to feel traumatized after childbirth:

- Modernized humans appreciate the ease of modern living because it makes life much easier. Sadly, this breeds a belief that, in this type of lifestyle, nothing bad SHOULD happen.
- Modern people forget how the rest of the world lives and how tough life can be.
- Risk aversion is on the rise. Disappointment and anger arise when a perceived “risk” produces a bad “outcome”: “It shouldn’t be like this,” or “Someone should have prevented this.”
- “Perfect births” are sought, yet with little or no exploration of what that actually means, so it’s simple to feel traumatized if anything unpleasant happens.
- Even Birth Plans are more about what one expects others to provide or give, rather than about one’s responsibility to achieve the desired birth.
- Modern people often do not let go of trauma easily.

Go through this list, and think about yourself and your beliefs as a human being living in a modern culture. Spend some time looking through *National Geographic* or watching programs about traditional lifestyles and urban slums. You’ll quickly realize that the modern lifestyle is easy (whether good, bad, right, or wrong) compared to others. Effort, hard work, and acceptance of adversity are all part of most people’s lives who do not have the benefits you do. This means you have to dig deeper inside yourself when faced with both a physical and emotional challenge.



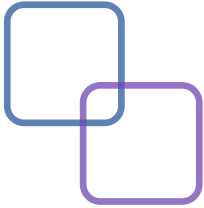
Unveiling Blame, Shame, and Guilt

Keep in mind that the Pink Kit evolved in the 1970s, when families didn't have many choices. When asked about their birth experience, women in past generations would often say, "That's just the way it was." Everyone worldwide seemed to work under the premise that there is no way to know what a birth will be like; therefore, there is nothing you can do about it. People just expected and accepted birth to be what it was, and if there was suffering, that was part of birth.

In general, a progressive labor was considered "normal," and pain was an expected and accepted part of birth. A long, drawn-out labor was considered a "complication" that might need surgical intervention, once that became available, which was only a few generations ago. If there was no surgical intervention available and a woman could not get her baby out, the baby died, and sometimes the woman did, too. This was considered sadly unfortunate, yet an expected (although feared) and accepted (although grieved) outcome.

If you think you can learn to heal your emotions from a traumatic birth from the wisdom of older generations, think again. In those generations, if women had an easy birth, they were lucky, and if they had a difficult birth, they were unlucky. If they had an "unlucky" birth, one that left them feeling traumatized, they were often told:

- "You'll soon forget." (This implied that, once childbirth was over, the woman wouldn't remember the pain. That's inaccurate and nonsensical. Women who have had very painful births remember the physical/emotional pain, even if they can't recreate it, and they often feel ashamed to admit they remember it because they've been told that they'll forget it.)
- "But look at your beautiful baby." (e.g., What more could you want. This goes along with the medical statement, "Both mother and baby are healthy and well.")
- "You were just unfortunate; it won't happen again." (Because each birth really is different, there's an erroneous belief that unfortunate births can't possibly repeat.)



None of those responses encourage real healing, of course. And going back just a few generations, it is quite difficult to get women to talk about their birth experiences. Experiment for yourself. Ask your older female relatives about their birth experiences. You'll probably hear something like this:

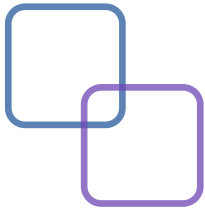
- *I had an easy birth.*
- *It was horrible.*
- *You were born at 11pm.*
- *Don't remember much about it.*
- *We didn't have choices like today.*

Contemporary generations do still operate under the assumption that we can't do anything about birth because there's no way to know what it will be like. But at least one thing has changed. Now, if a woman is asked about her birth experience, often a full description is given. You'll also notice that these traumatic contemporary birth stories are often full of the blame, shame, and guilt past women were told to bury or forget. Of course, not all birth stories are traumatic, yet there is a definite rise in the number of very negative birth stories.

Blame of others and/or self

Often, a woman feels traumatized from what was done to her. This feelings can extend to the belief that your god or the universe has targeted you and you don't deserve it.

- *I had a cascade of interventions I didn't want. She [my midwife/doctor] pressured me into ___ (induction, augmentation, episiotomy, moving to the hospital from home, Caesarean, etc.)*
- *They didn't listen to me when I said ___ (something is the matter, I feel like pushing, I don't feel like pushing, etc.)*
- *___ happened, then ___ happened then ___ happened . . . (they broke my water, they stimulated the labor, they gave me an epidural, they used forceps, etc.)*
- *He hurt me with a ___ (rough internal, poor administration of epidural, etc.)*



- *Because of that, I ___* (pushed for way longer than I should have had to, had a huge episiotomy and now it's painful having sex with my husband, etc.)
- *Why wasn't I informed ___* (my baby was in danger after 42 weeks of pregnancy, an epidural might not work, etc.)

If you have suffered from TABS, or still suffer from it now, go back and fill in the blanks for yourself as both a woman and a man. Permit yourself to blame others! Make a list.

Blame might also be self-directed:

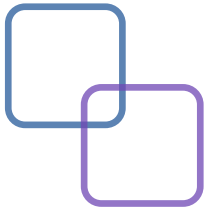
- *I should have ___* (listened to my doctor, stopped listening to my doctor, etc.)
- *I wouldn't listen to ___* (Everyone told me to have an amnio.)
- *I did everything, but I must not have tried hard enough.* (I tried every position and still had a Caesarean I didn't want, etc.)
- *Why didn't I find out about ___* (epidural side effects, solutions to specific problems, etc.)

If you have suffered TABS, go back and fill in the blanks for yourself as both a woman and a man. Permit yourself to blame yourself. Empty out your blame with your own experiences.

Shame

Shame is an interesting emotional quality. It's when you just *don't* like yourself.

- *I didn't deserve ___* (My sister had a terrible birth after learning so much and doing so much. I did nothing and had a great birth.)
- *I feel so foolish about ___* (I complained the whole time and was so needy.)
- *I didn't handle myself very well, and I'm embarrassed.* (I shouted at my partner who was trying to help; I swore at my midwife who was doing her best.)
- *I failed.* (I just can't birth normally. I tried everything, and nothing worked.)



If you have suffered TABS, both of you fill in the blanks for yourself. Permit yourself to feel the shame. Make a list.

Guilt

This is when you believe or know that what you have done has caused a problem.

- *Our baby ___ because of me.* (Our baby had spina bifida because of my poor diet, etc.)
- *My husband ___ because of me.* (He had a panic attack because I was screaming from the pain, etc.)

All three of these—blame, shame, and guilt—comprise feeling traumatized.

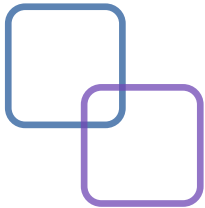
Recognizing Fathers Who Feel Traumatized

Although we mostly hear traumatic birth stories expressed by women, men are just as affected. It's about time that men who have felt traumatized by what they see at the birth of their own children get equal attention as women.

In fact, many more men are traumatized by the birth experience than is acknowledged. These traumatic feelings are often actually laughed at, if the woman is not left with any sense of trauma. The traumatic experience for a father can be entirely his own. Yet this must be validated, and fathers must be helped.

Not only can a man feel traumatized by what he sees and hears, he can feel traumatized by his helplessness, even in a simple, straightforward birth. This is why your Pink Kit Package is equally written for men as well as women. It's not fair or humane for a father-to-be to feel helpless and useless when such a dramatic and dynamic experience is occurring to someone he loves (see "Pain").

- Most men will only be at the birth of their own children, so they don't have a whole lot of practical experience.

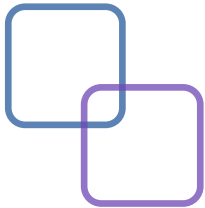


- Usually, men have less interest in childbirth preparation. They certainly don't read as much or do as much research about the pros and cons of medical care as their pregnant partner.
- Without experience or knowledge, when a man sees his partner in extreme pain, he might believe there's a problem, become frightened, and be confused when a professional tells him "That pain's normal."
- He might see procedures done and think his partner and baby are really at risk of dying or injury.
- A woman may feel all right about her birth experience, but a father may have been so blown out he has trouble bonding with his baby.
- If he felt useless and helpless, he may not have confidence to care for his newborn.
- If his partner also feels he was not able to help her during the birth and feels fine about her own experience, she may push him away as though he didn't act in a mature manner.
- Because of his birth experience, he might not know how to help his partner be a parent in the first few weeks. This is obviously aggravated if his partner pushes him away.

In the grand scheme of things, whatever has caused a father or mother to feel traumatized cannot be changed, but it's important you do something to heal the experience. No one would have wanted that experience for either of you. Going through a traumatic birth can hinder you from feeling confident as a new parent and as a partner, and that's not good.

Suffering

Why one person feels traumatized and another doesn't is hard to explain. This is both an individual characteristic and cultural. There are some people who accept trauma as part and parcel of their life. Others have been taught how to cope with trauma, while still others have lived in families where trauma is what defines their lives.



Terrible things can happen even with the greatest amount of preparation, and even to nice people. Time does not heal all wounds, and you may never be able to forgive or forget. Others may be to blame for your traumatized feelings, or you might be right in blaming yourself. These are all real and valid for you.

We hope, in time, that you will understand the profound significance of the old Chinese proverb: “If you can’t change the situation, change your attitude.” This very profound statement comes from the understanding that, unlike any other creature on earth, human beings have minds that can actually “choose” how they think and feel. This is the basis for most spiritual and religious belief systems. This is easier said than done, but a worthy goal.

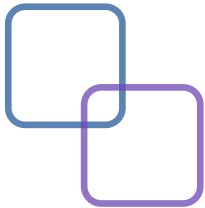
No one would have wanted you to feel traumatized by giving birth, because there is no doubt that feeling traumatized scars you and your family. Those who feel traumatized often believe they may suffer for the rest of their lives. Hopefully, you can use many skills and tools to heal.

For some people, having experienced trauma and survival brings forth a greater appreciation of life, family, self, and the blessing of each day. These are qualities of resilience.

Resilience

Healing from feeling traumatized by birth is one of the fundamental and symbolic actions that must be taken when passing through the Gateway of childbirth to parenting.

You enter pregnancy as an adult; you are physically mature enough to make a baby. This is true for both men and women. Pregnancy always transforms into birth, so, once you become pregnant, you are beginning the transformation from adult into parent. However, becoming a parent is not just a physical change achieved through



giving birth: it is an emotional, mental, and often spiritual metamorphosis. Adoptive parents go through a similar process.

Some of this transformation occurs during the period of pregnancy. Symbolically and literally, morning sickness is a way a woman gets rid of her internal junk and makes room to grow another being inside her. A pregnant woman has to make room to accommodate another person's development inside her body. A man makes this room and accommodation in his heart and mind.

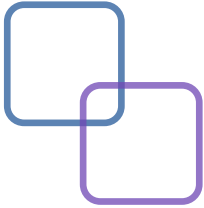
The change in a woman's body during pregnancy shows her that she can no longer focus exclusively on herself but must include the other being she nurtures within. Pregnancy makes men become more aware of themselves as "provider" and "protector." Few modern cultures honor the transformation of male adults into becoming fathers, and that is very sad. Your Pink Kit does!

One quality that grows as you move from being an adult into being a parent is resiliency. This quality matures over the years but is often fought against, as are other adult qualities, because they're neither understood nor appreciated. To many people, becoming an adult is more about what you can do that children can't do: drive a car, get married, drink, take a loan to buy a house, get pregnant. This means that many "adults" still have childish behaviors, like gratuitous anger, pouting, freezing someone out, or being demanding.

Make a list of your childlike behaviors that you are still clinging to.

When you move through the Gateway that is childbirth, you are required by the laws of nature to become a parent, and a parent must not compete with the child. This has profound implications to your physical, emotional, and mental life and your resiliency.

If you feel traumatized from your birth experience, this is no different from feeling traumatized by any other experience in life. Life can be full of traumatic experiences, and it is perfectly normal for any adult or child to suffer the emotional and physical



consequences of being traumatized. And the natural progression of healing must be respected and honored.

At the same time, your children cannot afford for you to remain traumatized. You must do everything you can to use this Gateway as an opportunity to rise above yourself and develop resilience, the ability to keep going. Your children are not the cause of your feeling traumatized by their births, no matter what. They need you to be a capable parent physically, emotionally, and mentally. Most importantly, YOU need to teach your children how to survive terrible experiences. This is one of the things a parent must teach their offspring!

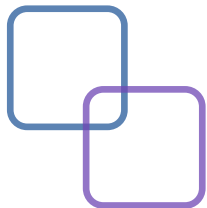
Healing from feeling traumatized, preventing the feeling, or reducing its impact on your life is not easy to do, but it is part of the fundamental quality of resiliency. Take a moment to project out into the rest of the world. As stated above, anyone living in a modern society has a much kinder lifestyle than those living traditionally. This doesn't mean there is no trauma. But for most humans living in developing countries, life is full of trauma. Death and suffering are very near, yet many of these people do not live "traumatized." Trauma isn't liked or wanted; it is endured, accepted, and ameliorated through laughter, patience, time, and the need to get on with life.

You cannot be the living dead. Become resilient; live with the ability to do so. It is both a healing and a parenting skill.

Forgive

As Dr. Phil and Oprah continue to point out, you do not have to forgive or forget. You do need to make a choice to let the traumatic experience no longer rule your life. This is not easy, but you need to work toward that goal for yourself and family.

You can move traumatized feelings into a different state of being by knowing, accepting, acknowledging, and feeling validated about your trauma. While you will



always live with the trauma, you and your family do not need to always live with you feeling traumatized.

Faith/Ceremony

In order to move out of the suspended state of being traumatized and back into living your life fully, you may need to make a ceremony or use your faith. Anything and everything you do to help yourself is a commitment to living a full life and not remain living in a gray shadow.

In fact, you might have to make a number of ceremonies. Do whatever it takes. What are your options? Stay angry, sad, or miserable? You cannot afford to choose those, not for yourself or your family.

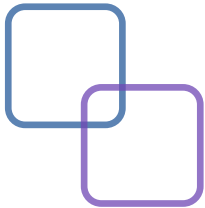
Turn your trauma into a blessing or healing for others who have been traumatized even more.

Preventive Maintenance

It's so easy to assume that "Once a traumatic birth, always a traumatic birth." Many women and men have been totally unprepared for and blown away by a subsequent birth's being a lovely experience.

This is where your Pink Kit excels. You can learn birth and coaching skills that may both prevent physical trauma and reduce emotional trauma. The many Pink Kit skills help you keep your attitude focused on what you are doing for yourself at every single moment.

Of course, there is no guarantee that your next birth situation will lend itself to a positive experience, even more so if you don't do anything for yourself. Never expect anyone to give to you or do something for you. No one can make you happy or sad or angry or calm. Emotionally, we have to do for ourselves in every situation. This is



not simple, and it takes time to learn how to do. But your children depend on you to do this. Nothing frightens children more a parent who is emotionally wounded and unable to guide the family.

Learning to take on the resilient role of parent will last for your lifetime and mature as you and your children grow. This is the same with your birth skills; once learned, they are yours forever. They can help you heal the past, deal with the present, and prepare for the future. The ownership you take of your Pink Kit skills will help you meet the challenge of giving birth as best you can by being in control of yourself, the way you behave, and your “Positive and Negative Voices.”

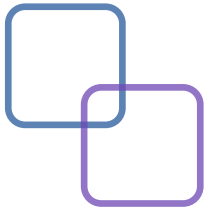
Didn't See It Coming

The majority of research indicates that your ability to respond to a traumatic experience and reduce or eliminate long-term, post-traumatic stress comes from having skills, even if you didn't see it coming. Humans thrive on being skilled, feeling competent and capable. In all human cultures, being skilled is one of our fundamental goals and what we strive for. We want to be skilled so strongly that learning new things dramatically improves our self-esteem. And once skills become second nature, we experience a sense of satisfaction for our mastery.

This sense of “mastery” of skills is evident in even the youngest children and the effort they make to learn. They repeat, repeat, and repeat, and fail, and fail, and fail, until they achieve. Then they know they know!

One goal of your Pink Kit Package is to give you the skills so that, if you experience trauma in your birth, you will be able to reduce or eliminate the possibility of feeling traumatized.

Another goal is for you to recognize what you didn't know you didn't know. Although you might believe this produces more shame, blame, and guilt, it in fact produces a sense of continued self-growth and knowledge.



Skilled Fathers Fare Better

Yet another goal of your Pink Kit Package is to give all men the skills to help their partner prepare for birth and give birth, in every situation. Men often feel less manly when they move out of their skill range. Childbirth skills have not been part of most men's upbringing, but this can change through the use of your Pink Kit.

As an expectant father, you must also become familiar with the assessment, monitoring, and procedures that often accompany childbirth. And you must also understand that some of these are uncomfortable or a bit unpleasant to experience. Your coaching skills can immensely help your partner to deal these common discomforts so that she isn't left with feeling traumatized.

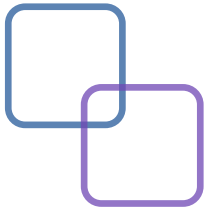
Birth Plans and Trauma

There is absolutely no doubt that, once Birth Plans and "choice" became the foundation for childbirth preparation and education, many more traumatic birth stories began to circulate based on major changes to Birth Plans and women not getting what they had wanted or requested.

Initially, a Birth Plan was meant to be a personal expression about a very personal experience and a way to navigate through the maze of medical care. In other words, families were expected to do their research about the pros and cons of the assessments, monitoring, and procedures that composed the standards of care in modern maternity systems and to discuss their choices with their birth professional.

However, the Birth Plan has unintentionally become a "wish list" of what a family does or does not want to happen. Birth Plans now are more like a menu full of items you check yes or no to, focused on what is expected of the service, and often based on philosophical beliefs about childbirth.

This use of Birth Plans frustrates birth providers who see Plans too often fail, usually due to the woman's inability to cope with, manage, or handle the naturally occurring



labor pains. More importantly, Birth Plans as they are now are a recipe for failure and disappointment for expectant parents. Many couples feel betrayed, angered, let down, and traumatized when they don't get what they wanted or the birth didn't go as "planned."

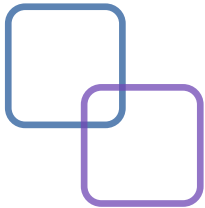
Birth Plans don't actually fail; they just need to include what preparations you are doing during your pregnancy so that you can make your plans a reality on the day of your baby's birth. They also have to include the specific skills that you will use as your birth unfolds on the day of, even if it is full of the unexpected. Nowhere in a traditional Birth Plan does an expectant family talk about what skills they will bring to their birth. This is sorely lacking.

Pink Kit families go fully prepared into childbirth, and they tend to work very well with their birth professionals even when they do not share the same beliefs about care options.

- They make a Birth Plan that is realistic to their situation and always speak to their birth professional about the efforts they will make to achieve their plan.
- Then they make a commitment to use their skills in whatever birth unfolds.
- Then they are willing to work with the situation as it unfolds to achieve the best process and outcome possible for both mother and child.

This is why your Pink Kit Package differentiates between having a "better birth" and "birthing better" and why Pink Kit families tend not to experience TABS even when bad things happen. They birth better and adapt their skills to the situation, rather than expect a "better birth" to be given to them. They do not feel disempowered, passive, or victimized by what is happening to them or around them.

This doesn't mean they never experience trauma or need time to heal from unfortunate processes and compromised outcomes. It does mean that they heal in a way that eventually permits them to move beyond the trauma. They never forget and sometimes never forgive, but they refuse to let their trauma rule their lives.



Control Issues and Trauma

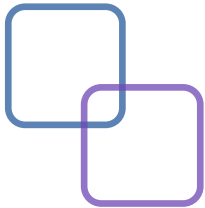
Controlling the many factors around childbirth is impossible. This can leave you feeling out of control, which can lead to feeling traumatized. However, from a Pink Kit perspective, “not being in control” is not the same as “feeling out of control.”

The basis for all your Pink Kit skills come from what exists in the middle of those two dynamic phrases. You will not be able to control childbirth or even what happens to you and around you. No matter how detailed your Birth Plan, birth will not go according to plan. However, you can almost always control your emotional responses, your mental processes, and your physical behavior, and this gives you a huge amount of control—over yourself.

Birth is full of the unexpected. One aspect of your passage through this Gateway from being an adult to being a parent is accepting that you are NOT in control. You cannot control when your baby cries, or when it’s hungry, tired, fussy, or learning to walk and bonking its little head all over the place. The one thing you *can* control is your ability to respond to any situation. And part of the role of being a parent is to teach your children how to develop all kinds of control: physical, mental, and emotional.

Throughout your life, you have probably known what it’s like to feel powerless now and then. That feeling is frequently due to a lack of skills. Giving birth is an activity that gives you plenty of opportunity to use skills so you feel capable instead of traumatized.

Feeling in control is a great desire of most human beings. We want so strongly to have the skills to feel in control that even failures during the learning process often affect our self-esteem until the skills become second nature. This is why practice is so essential.



Practice: Your Route to Competency

Your Pink Kit skills can often be done in the privacy of your own mind while you are doing other things.

One goal of your Pink Kit Package is to inspire you to fill your roles as birthing woman and birth coach with these simple-to-learn and effective skills, so that there is no possibility of you feeling traumatized due to a sense of personal inadequacy.

There are lots of other parents who have experienced a previous traumatic birth. Please know that there is much you can do to heal your partner and yourself. You are not alone.

What did I miss?

“I could tell my wife was in such pain. Her hair was wet, she was sweating, her lips were dry, her face was red. She groaned and moaned and told me how much it hurt. It went on like this for hours and hours, and the staff did nothing but come in and check her vital signs. She held my hand so tightly when the pains came I thought she would break my fingers, and I felt totally useless. If this was what birth was like, I just couldn’t imagine women doing this through the generations. I’ve never seen my wife suffer so.

“Then she started to push, and the efforts she made were heroic. She pushed so hard the veins in her eyes ruptured. The skin on her vagina was so stretched by the baby’s head. I couldn’t even imagine letting something that big out of my body. And the colors of our baby were so vivid—blues, reds, pinks, and blood. Was he all right? As soon as our baby was born, she totally changed. She looked at me and said, ‘That wasn’t too bad, can we do it again?’ I was totally traumatized, while she was ecstatic. What did I miss?”

This is why it is essential that both of you, as expectant parents, thoroughly work through your Pink Kit. You want to do this birth together! Practice with each other to prevent or reduce any possibility of feeling traumatized.