



International Childbirth Education Association

*Informed Consent – ICEA Teaching Idea Sheet #12*

Informed consent is the process by which people receiving health care make decisions about their care. To give informed consent you need enough *information* to be able to make decisions about your care and then the *opportunity* to make those decisions.

The information should include:

- *What* the proposed treatment is.
- What the *benefits* of the treatment are.
- What the *risks* of the treatment are.
- What the *alternatives* are to the treatment proposed and their risks and benefits.
- What would happen if you did *nothing*.

Informed consent is NOT simply signing a form. Informed consent requires knowledge – given in your language, in a way in which you can understand. And informed consent includes your opportunity to decide what care or treatment will be given based on this knowledge. There should be no penalties imposed if you do not agree to the recommended treatment.

There may be emergency situations where participating in the decision making process will not be desirable or possible, but in most cases she should be able to do so. Parents should learn during pregnancy about alternatives in procedures, treatments or drugs for labor. Then they will have time to decide what's best for them. Encourage them not to wait until labor begins.

Obstetrics, like other medical specialties, is not an exact science. Tests, procedures, and medications are sometimes given out of habit and custom, rather than because of scientific proof that they are safe or helpful. They are often made as a judgment call on the part of the health care provider. One can share in the decision making process when armed with the information to do so.

**What Your Students Need to Know**

- They can help their baby and themselves by knowing what is going on. Encourage them to ask questions so they will know what is going on and why.
- Their caregiver's job is to answer their questions. Empower

students with the knowledge that no one is allowed to do anything to them or to give them any medicine if they do not want it.

Teach them to ask questions about:

- Prenatal care
- Medication for labor and birth
- Labor management
- The hospital stay
- Postpartum routines
- Newborn care routines
- How to care for your baby
- Lab tests
- Postpartum check-ups

She should find out:

- *What* her caregiver wants to do
- *Why* he/she wants to do it
- *What* will happen *if she doesn't* do it
- What the *risks* are
- *What else* she could do

Recommend that she write down her questions and bring them to her visit with her midwife or doctor.

Tell her to keep asking questions, even in labor. It's never too late to change one's mind about anything.

