



International Childbirth Education Association

Use of Music in Childbirth Classes – ICEA Teaching Idea Sheet #8

From ancient chants and mantras to New Age music, women have used music during birthing for its ability to decrease pain and to celebrate the joyous beginning of life. Research demonstrates that music has therapeutic properties. Among these are reduction of anxiety; decrease in blood pressure, heart rate and respiration; decrease in stress hormones; altered perception of pain and enhanced relaxation response.

Music appeals to both the right- and left brain-dominated listener. The right brain is accessed by the qualities of music that enhance visualization, create moods and evoke emotional responses. The left brain is accessed by the concentration required to utilize music as an aid to breathing, chanting, counting and attention-focusing. Certain instruments affect particular hemispheres as follows:

Physical Body – brass, percussion, heavy sounds of bass notes, most electronic music (left brain)

Emotional – woodwinds and strings (right brain)

Mental – strings (left and right brain)

Soul – harp and organ; wind chimes; high strings (right brain)

The childbirth educator can utilize music in a variety of ways during the childbirth class. By introducing music in classes, the educator gives it status as a pain relief technique and thereby increases the likelihood that women will use it during labor and delivery.

Applications for music in childbirth classes:

- Introduce music as a strategy for pain relief.
- Pair music with relaxation techniques.
- Pair music with breathing techniques.
- Utilize music as background for pregnancy and birth visualizations.
- Use music to create a calming atmosphere as couples arrive, during breaks, and as they leave class.
- Introduce various styles of music.
- Encourage students to bring their choice of music for class sharing.

The following exercise may be utilized as an introduction to music as an enjoyable experience. It should be prefaced with a statement that the exercise's intent is only to experience music and not for any other purpose.

Exercise for preparing for a meaningful music experience

Before beginning the music:

1. Come to quiet for a minute. Speak to your body; tell any tense areas to relax. Speak to your feelings; tell them to be calm. Speak to your mind; let go of racing thoughts.
2. Be grateful for the music you are about to experience. Say "Thank you."
3. Surrender to the music and open yourself to the music you hear.

While the music is playing

4. Release all tensions into the music. Feel the music pulling you out of all negativity and tension. Wherever there is a block in you, visualize an opening. Breathe deeply,

taking in the music. Let go completely.

5. Feel the music embracing and filling you. Release all need to dominate and control the situation. Open to the healing, revitalizing currents of melody that are entering you. Go inside the sound.
6. Give yourself to the music. Enjoy the music wherever it takes you.

When the music is over

7. Take time to absorb the music. Sit quietly for a few minutes after it is finished.
8. Be filled with joy for the musical experience.

Applications for labor and birth

I. Aiding relaxation

- A. Select music with low pitch, low intensity and rhythmic repetition, i.e. 3/4 or 4/4 beat for deep relaxation.
- B. Use New Age music with no definable rhythm or melody to produce a quiet and calming effect.
- C. Choose appropriate music to enhance childbirth classes which focus on a particular spiritual approach or philosophy.
- D. Let music dictate pace and depth of breathing.
- E. Listen to spaces between the sounds rather than the sounds themselves.
- F. Imagine being bathed or massaged by music.
- G. Imagine that the music is breathing you.

- H. Imagine being the instrument that makes the sound and feel the vibrations as it plays.
- I. Attempt to become totally immersed in the music.

II. Attention focusing or distraction

- A. Select music with distinct rhythm, melody or vocals.
- B. Add to concentration by using music with increased pace or volume.
- C. Allow the music to provide a pace for breathing.
- D. Focus on vocals to increase concentration.

III. Tone setting/creating atmosphere

- A. Select music to set a certain tone, i.e. calming, energy producing, and harmony.
- B. Choose music with no distinct melody line to produce a calming effect.
- C. Create the atmosphere and/or memory of a special place by using environmental selections.
- D. Choose favorite songs with a special message for delivery or to welcome the new baby. (Many contemporary/popular songs are appropriate for this.)

IV. Enhancing visualization

- A. Select music with no distinct melody line to allow less concentration for free flowing images.
- B. Music with rhythmic repetition has physiological and psychological calming effects that enhance the

receptiveness of the right brain to visualization.

V. Assisting breathing

- A. Choose music with distinct rhythm.
- B. Select 3/4 or 4/4 beat for slow breathing.
- C. Increase pace and intensity for faster breathing patterns.
- D. Driving melody with percussion, strong rhythm and increased volume may be used for pushing.

VI. Providing rhythm for chanting, mantras, rocking

- A. Gregorian or American Indian chants may be used.
- B. Use music with Eastern/Oriental influence for mantras.
- C. Choose music with distinct rhythms for chanting.
- D. Increased volume and music with a driving beat can provide background for chants.
- E. Rock or move in rhythm with a strong beat to provide pain relief by stimulating joint receptors found in joint capsules, ligaments and synovial membranes throughout the body.

By incorporating music as a teaching technique, the educator can offer couples in childbirth classes another tool to help them in their labor and birth experiences and allow them to become more active in the birth of their baby.