ICEA
International Childbirth Education Association

ICEA Position Paper

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Physiologic Birth

Position

Birth is a unique and synergistic process between parent and fetus. The International Childbirth Educators Association (ICEA) recognizes physiologic birth as a birth where the baby is birthed vaginally following a labor which has not been modified by medical interventions.

INTRODUCTION

ICEA promotes the consensus that childbirth is a safe and natural human event. It is the purpose of this position paper to identify the parameters of healthy, safe, normal human physiologic childbirth. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines birth as "spontaneous in onset, low-risk at the start of labour and remaining so throughout labour and delivery. The infant is born spontaneously in the vertex position between 37 and 42 completed weeks of pregnancy. After birth, parent and infant are in good condition.

NORMAL PHYSIOLOGIC CHILDBIRTH

- is characterized by spontaneous onset and progression of labor
- includes biological and psychological conditions that promote effective labor
- results in the vaginal birth of the infant and placenta
- results in physiological blood loss
- facilitates optimal newborn transition through skin-to-skin contact and keeping the parent and infant together during the postpartum period
- supports early initiation of breastfeeding.

Based upon the above criteria, it is also logical to extrapolate that normal physiological birth is one that is without interference, complications, and in line with normal body functions.

FACTORS INFLUENCING PHYSIOLOGIC BIRTH

For most pregnant individuals, physiologic birth is an achievable outcome of pregnancy. The parent's health

status and education are two of the most important factors. A pregnant person's confidence, autonomy, and personal knowledge surrounding labor and birth may be directly influenced by the amount of education prior to the birth. Access to a primary maternity care provider skilled in physiologic care, attendance at a childbirth education class that is focused on normal physiologic birth, as well as individual education (reading and internet exploration) impacts the informed decision making process. Access to a collaborative health care team is an important factor influencing normal physiologic birth. Care providers need the education, knowledge, and skill to support physiologic labor and birth as well as an infrastructure supportive of physiologic birth. Goer and Romano (2012) define physiologic care as the use of supportive care practices and low-technology techniques that facilitate the normal biological process of birth.

BENEFITS OF PHYSIOLOGIC BIRTH

- less postpartum pain
- quicker physical recovery from the birth
- increase in self-esteem as a result of the birth
- enhanced bonding with the baby
- reduced likelihood of post-natal depression
- a calmer, more settled baby
- an easier feeding experience
- effective respiratory transition for the baby
- effective gut colonization that prevents allergies in the baby

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Physiologic birth is evidence-based and optimal care for parents and babies. Expectant parents can optimize their chances for a physiologic birth by becoming informed in childbirth education classes. Pregnant clients need to be aware of the benefits to parents and babies of physiologic birth as well as the risks of interventions. Childbirth educators may act as advocates for and promote the research on physiologic birth in their classes, hospital in-service education, conferences/meetings and through social media. Effective teaching should not only reflect current evidence-based information but also the concept of best practice. Informed decision making must be at the forefront of the presentation of physiologic childbirth. The goals of prenatal childbirth education are to build the client's confidence in their ability to give birth, to provide knowledge about normal birth, and to help clients develop individualized birth plans that provide a road map for keeping birth as normal as possible even if complications occur. Providing positive sources of media information, such as social media or web information, can assist expectant individuals in their quest for knowledge. Maternity care providers can become knowledgeable about physiologic birth and about sharing coping skills and techniques that support normal birth. Keeping policies, procedures, and practice guidelines updated and evidence-based also contributes to an environment that honors and facilitates normal physiologic birth.

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