

Five ways to improve the birth experience

June 28 2022, by Claire Parker



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Whether you're a first time parent or have had children before, you're probably willing to try anything to ensure you have the most positive birth experience you can. After all, the kind of birth experience you have can not only affect your own mental health, but can have an [affect on parent-child bonding](#), as well as partner-to-partner relationships for years after giving birth.

It can be confusing to know what to expect or where to turn to for advice, especially as maternity services have changed due to [falling staff numbers](#) and the [continued impact of COVID-19](#). But here are a few things you can do yourself as you navigate your [maternity care](#), which may help you have a more positive birth experience:

1. Get educated

[Studies](#) have shown that signing up for antenatal classes can help reduce fear, depression and anxiety—both during pregnancy and after birth.

Typically, antenatal classes will help you understand what's happening to your body during pregnancy and explain the birth process. They may also teach you coping strategies to help relax during labor, alongside guidance on caring for your new baby. Antenatal classes can also be a great way of meeting other parents going through the same thing as you.

Another option is creating a [personalized care and support plan](#), which is offered by most NHS trusts in the UK. This is a tool you can use with your [care providers](#) to explore what's important to you—and discuss what your range of options are, such as your preferred place of birth, or whether you prefer skin-to-skin contact with your baby immediately after birth.

Understanding what your body's going through, and making a personalized plan for your birth, may help you feel more prepared and less anxious about what to expect.

2. Know your caregivers

Being cared for by one nominated midwife, or being assigned to a team of familiar midwives, is shown to be associated with [better outcomes](#) for

you and your baby—including decreased chance of having a premature labor and lower likelihood of needing interventions (such as birth with the help of forceps). You're also more likely to be [satisfied with your overall experience](#).

When an allocated midwife is not an option this makes choosing the right birth partners crucial. They can not only offer you reassurance, encouragement and support but can be your advocate, help you try different positions in labor and help provide you with snacks and drinks. Most typically these would be trusted loved ones. But be aware that research shows birth partners may also feel [anxious or overwhelmed](#) at taking on this role, and may struggle with seeing a loved one in pain—so it's important to be realistic about your expectations, and choose the right person. It may be the best birth partner for you is a close friend or relative.

3. Challenge care recommendations if you aren't happy

There are likely to be many other options available to you—such as where you might give birth, or how you want to be cared for during labor.

During antenatal appointments be sure to pause, think and ask about [benefits, risks and alternatives](#) to the care being proposed. Research shows how important [choice and personalized care](#) are for expectant parents who want their voices and preferences to be acknowledged, and to receive consistent advice.

If you have concerns over a suggestion your care providers have made or have questions, don't be afraid to ask. Take your birth partner with you if you prefer, who can empower you to ensure your voice is heard. After

all, care providers are duty bound to ensure you make [fully informed choices](#).

4. Don't always listen to your friends and family

Once people hear you have a baby on the way it seems everyone feels the need, without asking, to tell you the full (and often graphic) details of their own children's birth.

But it's perfectly acceptable to politely change the subject if you don't want to listen, or if hearing these stories makes you nervous or worry. It's also worth remembering that each person has a different labor and birth, even with their own children—so what was true for someone else is likely not to be the same for you. While it can be helpful for some people to [debrief after the birth](#), it's okay to avoid hearing this yourself if it makes you nervous, and maybe suggest they speak with a professional about their experience instead of telling you.

5. Visit your preferred place of birth

Many maternity units are now opening up their doors again to tours and informal visits—and those that aren't are doing this virtually.

Becoming familiar with where you might give birth—even down to where you might park on the day—can help you feel more confident about giving birth. It may also remove some of the unknown, helping you regain a sense of control—which in itself is linked to a [more positive birth experience](#).

For those planning a homebirth, speak to your midwife about how you can improve your space to facilitate the most safe and positive experience. For one of the most important days of your life, visualizing

where this will take place ahead of time can help you feel more confident and in control.

Ultimately, it's important to remember that no one can predict exactly how your labor and [birth](#) journey will go. Even after heeding the above steps—there's always a chance you may need to consider a plan B, C or even D. But no matter what, remember you've done your very best, and you're not likely to repeat this exact experience the next time.

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