

# Map

## Obstetric Symbols Reframe



*Objects hold both literal and symbolic meanings.*

For some, objects common to medical environments—monitors, IV poles, surgical gloves, hospital gowns, etc.—may evoke certain associations and emotional **responses**. These responses might be rooted in past medical experiences; common cultural understandings from movies, television, and so on; and/or anxiety about the unknown.

In this practice, you will consider how objects commonly found in medical environments in general and medical birth spaces in particular might influence emotions or behavior in labor. The process offers parents an opportunity to create new associations for objects that they may find to be activating or triggering, either now or when they encounter them in labor and birth.

1. Make a chart with three columns.
2. In the first column, list of all the objects you can think of that might be in a hospital/labor and delivery room. Leave space between the items on this list to allow for wide rows.

3. Visualize the first object. What meanings does it have for you? Holding the image and assigned meaning in mind, notice the emotions and reactions that they are evoking now, and imagine the emotions and reactions they may evoke when you are in labor.
4. Record these meanings/emotions/reactions in the second column next to the object.
5. Look at what you have written, and consider how encountering this object without any preparation could potentially initiate a chain reaction in your body and mind that could affect your labor experience.
6. Repeat steps 3, 4, and 5 for each object.

**Don't read on until you've completed the above steps for all of your listed objects.**

Made objects of course have intended purposes; a lamp is intended to provide light, for example, and a table is intended to provide a surface on which other objects can be placed). However, it can be helpful to consider the idea that objects *themselves* don't have their own internal intentions independent of their makers, users, and viewers. Rather, individuals and sociocultural groups assign meanings to objects. Some of these meanings are taught/learned explicitly, some are gathered up unintentionally in the course of our growth and development, and some may be hardwired in our biology. (For example, there is ample evidence that fear of snakes – and therefore snakelike objects – is part of human biology.)

When we encounter objects, we also encounter these assigned meanings, and we instantaneously experience involuntary emotional and physiological responses to those meanings. This can be helpful, as in the previous example of a snakelike object, or a driver's learned involuntary response to a red traffic light. It can also, however, cause unnecessary confusion or dysregulation. In labor, for example, the fear response, and the shift to the "thinking brain" necessary to control or negotiate that response, can complicate the hormonal feedback loop governing contractions and coping. That's why we might consider challenging or adjusting negative assigned

meanings prenatally, before we are fully occupied with labor and somewhat at the mercy of instinctive, unthinking responses.

**With this understanding in mind, go back to your list.** What new, or adjusted, meanings might you be able to find in the objects there? A wall clock could be less about time pressure, or logging the length of your labor, and more about announcing the baby's birth time. Latex gloves could be less about medicalization and clinical detachment and more about keeping your body safe and private, or allowing your hands to be the first to directly touch your baby. (These are just examples – these particular objects and meanings may not be the ones that hold particular weight for you.)

Do this for all of the objects on your list, and write the new assigned meanings in the third column.

object	meanings, emotions, reactions	new meanings
<i>Clock on the wall</i>	<i>Time pressure, length of labor Taking too long Hurry up Anxiety, self doubt Tension Wanting/agreeing to medical efforts to speed labor</i>	<i>People are gathering information to support me Announcement of when my baby is born</i>