

Resource Document

Guidelines for Leading Birth Art



"Engaging in any sort of visual expression results in the reward pathway in the brain being activated, which means that you feel good and it's perceived as a pleasurable experience." —Girija Kaimal

Guidelines for Leading Birth Art:

1. Help parents understand the purpose and value of Birth Art before asking them to draw. Be matter of fact, don't apologize for the process. You might tell parents...
 - How art making slows the brain waves down just like in labor.
 - How Birth Art helps you prepare for birth in an embodied way. It helps to balance out the typical cerebral preparation that is common for modern

parents.

- How art is an opportunity to explore how you move through the Unknown, how you find the next small step when you're not sure what to do, and how you keep going even if it doesn't look exactly as you had imagined.
 - Help parents understand that the value of Birth Art is in the process, not the end product. They may feel reassured to hear that you won't be doing "show and tell" at the end. Give parents the Birth Art assignment in a slow, somewhat-hypnotic voice, leaving enough space for their imagination to begin creating an image before they pick up the pastels. Leave your language about what they will draw ambiguous enough so that they're not drawing images that you gave them, or trying to please you with their artwork.
2. When you see parents begin to slow down, or look like they're not sure what to do next, offer them a keep going prompt. Invite them to find out what happens when they reach that point where they don't know what to do next, just as they likely will in labor, and find out what happens when they take the next small step without knowing what will happen next.
 3. Give the parents 1-3 journaling prompts – not the whole list! They can write about their art process on a separate paper, or even on the back of the art paper. Turning their drawing over can help parents remember to focus on the process over product. Journaling helps them transition back into the verbal part of their brain, and be more ready to discuss their insights and reflections than going straight from art to

discussion.

4. Ask the parents about one of the journaling prompts.
Example: What surprised you about your art making process? Then...

Validate: Validate their positive intentions, their needs, their feelings, or their new insights.

Motivate: Ask a solution-focused question or two. Make sure the question is relevant to their process and reflections, not chosen randomly. Here are some examples of Solution Focused Questions from Heart of Mentoring:

- How do you know to do that?
- What is it about XYZ that appeals to you/doesn't appeal to you?
- **Scaling:** On a scale from 1-10, where are you in terms of ex. speaking up for yourself today (assuming this was an issue that came up through the art-making process), with 1 meaning you never speak up for yourself, and 10 meaning you do so with ease? How did you get all the way to X? If you were just one notch further up the scale (X+1), what would be different for you? What would you be able to do or say?
- **Exceptions:** If the client expresses something they'd like to do more or less of, ask about a time in the past when they were able to do that thing (or not do that thing), or, if they say never, when they have come closest to doing that thing.
- How is this showing up as a problem for you?

- What have you already tried? What worked? What didn't?

Educate: (if needed) Is there something that would be beneficial for this parent to know about birth, hormones, hospitals, physiology, etc. in relationship to what came up in their Birth Art process?

Initiate: The art making is an initiation! But it's possible that there may be additional embodied tasks that would benefit the parent. You might show them how to do an inversion, show their partner how to do a hip squeeze, or some other task of initiation.

Celebrate: Acknowledge the parent's new awareness, growth, efforts, or vulnerability.

Birth Art Do's:

- Stay open and flexible
- Bring your curiosity
- Notice any assumptions that are coming up for you – about the parent, their art, what they should think about birth, or how they should feel and make a commitment to yourself to explore them later...not stuff them down and pretend they don't exist!
- Focus on the art making process.
- Engage in your own art making process and solution-focused reflections regularly, so that when you lead parents through

Birth Art, it will come from a heartfelt place of personal experience.

Birth Art Don'ts:

- Don't be attached to outcome – that the parent creates a certain kind of image, or that they feel happy or create a “positive” image.
- Don't create your own meaning about their Birth Art.
- Don't assess or make meaning of their art work.
- If they show you their drawing, it's fine to glance at it, but stay focused on their process of self-discovery, not what's on the paper.