

Written By Carla Williams

Why We Shouldn't Fear Birth, and Why Birth Shouldn't Be Treated as a Medical Event

By

Carla Williams



Modern medicine is amazing and very much needed. I am a doctor, so surely, I have seen it cure disease and save lives. I have also seen medicine be overused and even abused. As an obstetrician, I care for pregnant and birthing people. I have been taught to detect when things may be going wrong in a pregnancy or during the labor process. I know how to implement medical and surgical interventions in order to keep my patients safe and ensure their babies are born healthy. Unfortunately, with all of our knowledge and education, our training as doctors tends to place less emphasis on learning how to refrain from interfering when there is not a clear need to.

Image Source: Carla Williams / Finalis Valdez

My perspective on birth is unique for a number of reasons. One is that a large portion of my clinical training prior to residency took place in a third-world country. In the public hospitals of the Dominican Republic, where I rotated during my years in medical school, unmedicated birth is the norm.

Another distinction is that my involvement in birthwork is not limited to obstetrics. I also serve as a birth doula, supporting clients through labor in a non-clinical form. I have experienced birth without interventions personally and have held space many times for others doing the same. I am accustomed to physiologic birth because I've lived and witnessed it countless times. I cannot say the same for most of my physician colleagues.

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Perhaps it is counterintuitive, but doing nothing can be a powerful tool. We often associate skills with actions, like performing a cesarean delivery, for example. But there is also skill in knowing when to take a step back and allow nature to unfold. When a pregnancy is deemed low-risk, things tend to go right. In this setting, the vast majority of the time, labor is a process that is better left alone. As caregivers, we have the responsibility of educating our patients on all options available to them with respect to how their child will be born. This includes physiologic birth without interventions, procedures that may be routine but are oftentimes unnecessary. The reality is that birth is a bodily function like any other. So why is there so much fear surrounding it?

There is no one-size-fits-all answer here. The fear of “undisturbed” birth is held by both physicians and the pregnant person. It can be driven by multiple factors. For starters, from a young age, we are bombarded with imagery and stories causing us to view birth as pure chaos that requires the birther to be saved.

This narrative causes a person’s trust during pregnancy and birth to be displaced outward, from self onto an outsider. The birthing person doesn’t trust their own body’s design, leaning instead on a medical provider. In turn, with so many obstetricians sitting in discomfort with regard to natural

birth and simply relying on their training to always take action, we are left with an industrialized care model. One that depends heavily on medical and technological “advancements” instead of believing in the self-sufficiency of the body.



Image Source: Carla Williams / Katherine Marivelle



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it and assume an active role in dismantling it. I do believe a cultural shift is occurring. I believe many are beginning to affirm that the body is capable. That pregnancy is not a disease and that birth is not a medical event, it's an experience that is innate to us if we let it guide us and take its natural course.

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