

The Take Charge Routine, By Penny Simkin, PT

Reserve this for any time in labor when your partner hits an emotional low or:

- She is in despair, weeps or cries out
- She wants to give up and feels she cannot go on
- She is very tense and cannot relax
- She is in a great deal of pain

The take charge routine is exactly that. You move in close and do all you can to help her until she regains her inner strength. Usually her despair is temporary; with your help she can pass through it and her spirits will rise.

Use whatever parts of the following seem appropriate:

• **Remain Calm.** Your touch should be firm and confident. Your voice should remain calm and encouraging.

• **Stay close by her side, your face near hers..**

• **Anchor Her.** Hold her shoulders or her head in your hands gently, confidently, firmly or hold her tightly in your arms.

• **Change your ritual during contractions.** Try a different position. Try changing the breathing pattern. Breathe with her or pace her with your own hand or voice.

• **Encourage her every breath.** Guide her in abdominal breathing *“Breathe with me...BREATHE WITH ME... That’s the way...Just like that...Good...Stay with it...Just like that...Look at me...Stay with me...Good for you...It’s going away...Good...Good...Now just rest. That was good.”* You can whisper these words or just say them in a calm, encouraging tone of voice. Sometimes you have to raise your voice in order to get her attention. But try to keep your tone calm and confident.

• **Talk to her between contractions.** Ask her if what you are doing is helping. Make suggestions: for example, *“With the next one let me help you more. I want you to look at me the moment it starts. We will breathe together so it won’t get*

ahead of us. Okay? Good. You’re doing so well. We are really moving now...”

• **Repeat Yourself** She may not be able to continue what you tell her for more than a few seconds, but that’s fine. Say the same things again and help her continue.

• **What if she says she can’t or won’t go on?**

Do not give up on her. This is a difficult time for her. You cannot help her if you decide she cannot handle it. Acknowledge to her and to yourself that it is difficult but not impossible. Ask for help and reassurance. The nurse, midwife or doula can help a lot -- measuring dilation, giving you advice, doing some of the coaching, trying something new, even reassuring *you* that your partner is Okay and that this is normal. Remind her of the baby. It may seem surprising, but some laboring women are so caught in labor that they do not think much about their baby. It may help her to remember why she is going through all of this.

• **What about pain medication?** Avoiding them is best for both mom and baby. You need to assess:

- Her prior wishes how strongly did she feel about an un-medicated birth?
- How rapidly is she progressing? How far does she have to go?
- How well is she responding to more active coaching?
- Is she asking for medication herself? How easily can she be talked out of them?

These factors should help you decide what to do. It is sometimes difficult to balance present wishes against prior wishes. Try to stick with what she wanted before labor regarding medication use. But, if in labor she insists on changing from a plan of not using them, respect her wishes. Numerous women have said, *“I never could have done it without my partner. If it would not have been for him (or her) I would have given up.”* By using the Take Charge Routine, you can indeed get your partner through those desperate moments when she feels she cannot go on. You can truly ease her burden by helping her with every breath. Remember the 5/30 rule – try to make it through 5 more contractions or 30 minutes whichever comes first.