

Birth Trauma

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A MESSAGE FOR YOU...

The birthing of a baby, and the birthing of a mother and of a father, is a significant transitional event in our lives.

A mothers experience of birth, can go onto shape her experiences of motherhood in its entirety. Her experiences of self, her experiences of her relationships (particularly the relationship with her baby), and her experiences of the world and how she feels supported, or unsupported in her journey of motherhood.

Just a few weeks ago, we acknowledged the presence of birth trauma within our society, through 'Birth Trauma Awareness Week'. With the awareness that this week brought, questions and comments came flooding in. So we, Calm Birth and myself, together, felt it was important to offer some important information on Birth Trauma.

In my role as a Psychologist supporting women and men throughout their parenting journey, I have heard so many stories of birth experiences where the mother and father both share stories of trauma, soon followed by feelings of guilt stemming from their unresolved feelings of how their birth experience has impacted them in a negative way, and how their experience still carries a heavy weight; days, weeks, months and sometimes years into their parenting journey

There are common assumptions around birth, that lead to many unhelpful comments from often well meaning others such as 'you should be grateful, you have a beautiful healthy baby', 'birth is scary but you will get over it' 'all that matters is a healthy baby'. These reflections from others come from the belief that a traumatic birth is a birth that is high risk and complicated for both mother and baby, or a birth that results in loss. This assumption has led to many women, who have experienced trauma during and following their birthing experience, to hold back from seeking support.



Quote

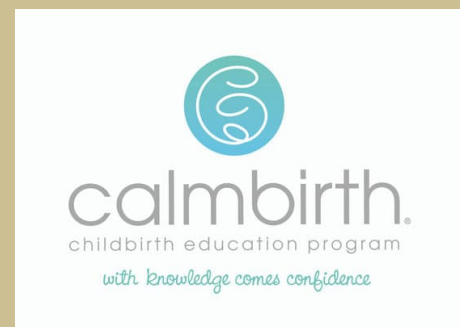
"Birth trauma is not your fault, it is not shameful and you can heal when your ready" - Better Births Illawarra

WHAT IS BIRTH TRAUMA?

- As beautifully articulated in the book 'How To Heal A Bad Birth' by Melissa Brujin and Debby Gould, a 'good birth' is a birth where the woman needs to feel empowered, safe, supported by those around her and by her knowledge base, respected, nurtured, able to ask questions, and that her expert knowledge about herself and her baby is acknowledged and respected. A 'bad birth' is defined as a birth where the women may feel powerless, confused, fearful, isolated or abandoned, unacknowledged or unheard, and that her innate knowledge about her body and her baby are being disregarded.
- Trauma is a natural response to a distressing event affecting us emotionally, psychologically, socially and somatically. Trauma is a response from the brain and the nervous system when there is an overload of information that goes beyond the brain's capacity to cope. Unlike the medicalised definition of trauma, birth trauma is not defined by physical harm or injury. Birth trauma is a result of how a woman felt during her birthing experience, and not, a result of what happened during their birthing experience. Interpersonal experiences during a birth experience can be the element of ongoing distress.
- The physiology of birth produces hormones such as oxytocin, that prime a women's brain and body for trust, openness and connection, and safety through connection. The women birthing is primed for safety, scanning her environment for information as to whether her baby and herself are safe. This increases a women's need for environmental, relational and interpersonal safety.

WHAT IS BIRTH TRAUMA?

- Birth trauma does not discriminate based on culture, level of education, race, birthing experience.
- It is known that women who have experienced trauma (not only birth trauma) previously may be at a higher risk of experiencing birth trauma.
- Non birthing partners can also experience trauma during birth.
- Birth workers can experience birth trauma.
- Birth is subjective in that a similar version of events during a birth, may be traumatic for one women, but, not another.
- 1 in 5 of women who give birth, experience birthing trauma..



HELPFUL THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Relationship based care
- Empowerment of choice through education around birthing
- Awareness of Birth Trauma
- Opportunity to speak your truth, share your story and in doing so feel heard, validated, and held
- Seek support
- Know your rights, and your options
- If you have experienced birth trauma, speak with a trusted mental health professional, birth worker with experience in traumatic birth may be helpful

Just like a child needs to feel safe, soothed, secure and seen during the vulnerable transition's and experiences of growth during childhood. A mother too, needs to feel safe, seen, soothed and secure during her transition into and through motherhood.

RESOURCES

BIRTHTALK.ORG & THE GIDGET FOUNDATION

BOOK – HOW TO HEAL FROM A BAD BIRTH, WRITTEN BY –MELISSA BRUJIN & DEBBY GOULD