Bouncing Back!

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ABSTRACT

In this column, a childbirth educator takes a humorous look at discovering how to recharge her enthusiasm and motivation.

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Educating others is important, fulfilling work, but sometimes the process loses its “thrill.” There are times, as I prepare to leave the house, when I long to spend my evening numbly watching some reality television show instead. (Did I just say that?) When I have such a startling and honest thought, I know it is time to look into a professional makeover of my own. I need a boost of enthusiasm.

My first line of defense is to reach out to a colleague who, at the very least, will sympathize. Carol, a relatively new childbirth educator, contacted me for that very reason. She was frustrated by several hospital policies she felt were undermining her class participants’ confidence. One of the policies was a safety protocol restricting parents from holding their infants while standing or walking. “Some of our teen parents are especially nervous about holding and caring for their baby,” Carol explained. “Helping them to feel comfortable and capable is just as important as demonstrating how to swaddle and hold a newborn. Once in the hospital, these same families are told the policy is designed to prevent parents from dropping their children!”

The conversation reminded me of a wonderful moment I had a few years ago while visiting a private birthing center in New Zealand. Touring the facility, I was astounded to find rooms equipped with lovely, newborn “hammocks” suspended by a sort of bungee cord mounted on the ceiling above each mother’s bed. Nestled in these fairy-tale-like mesh and cloth cradles were sleeping babies, rocking gently close by their “mums.” Here, instead of maneuvering out of bed to retrieve a crying infant from a bassinet, the resting mother simply pulled the child toward her to cuddle or nurse, or she created a rocking motion by giving the cradle a gentle tug and releasing.

Can you imagine how that concept would go over in most traditional facilities? Risk managers would have nightmares about parents pulling the hammocks too tightly. Visions of babies swaying into windows and walls come to mind. And, of course, teen parents would fling babies to nursing stations in slingshot fashion!

There is nothing wrong with the motto, “Safety First!”—as my friend’s 4-year-old son Michael is quick to point out—but sometimes we forget what messages our rules convey, beyond safety and avoiding litigation.

Carol and I shared many laughs as we bounced around ways to help new families feel competent while abiding by hospital rules. We both agreed confidence-building is essential and serves clients well beyond policies and procedures, overbearing nurses, condescending physicians, and countless well-meaning relatives along the way. We are doing the important work of helping new mothers and fathers create a solid foundation for parenting. This *is* exciting after all!

Soon, we looked forward to applying our new ideas for reframing and rephrasing discussions about various hospital policies and rules. I am thrilled Carol called. When it comes to needing an “extreme enthusiasm makeover,” television’s Ty Pennington, Paige Davis, or the Queer Eye’s Fab Five couldn’t have done a better job helping me bounce back.

DEB GAULDIN is a childbirth educator who travels nationally presenting keynotes and workshops. Her CDs and tapes contain humor and songs about pregnancy, childbirth, and the adjustment to parenthood. For booking information or to purchase Deb’s recordings, call 800-682-2347 or visit her Web site (www.debgauldin.com).