

Relationship Building Techniques with Fathers: Gender Communication Styles

By Amy L. Gilliland, Ph.D., CD(DONA)

Prenatal Visits

1. When asking questions, **understand that a man's stated answer or opinion may be the beginning of a negotiation, not his concluding opinion.** (Save your emotions!) Respond with "Tell me more about that" – it opens the door.
2. Conversation with the male partner will more likely be to the point. **You will build rapport by doing things together where you share equally.** Ask him to show you where on her body his partner likes to be touched. What relaxes her. Let him show you his expertise. Then you can work other techniques into the exchange. Remember this is cross cultural communication!!
3. If he challenges you, your knowledge or experience, that's okay. **So, just because a male seems to argue with you does not necessarily indicate a problem,** either personal or professional. It may just be his way of engaging with you and getting to know you. You will know better the next time you interact if its personal or just his style.
4. **Some women are overly concerned about their mates' wellbeing during labor.** When a contraction ends, they will ask him how he is doing or try to see that his needs are met. This can interfere with relaxation and labor progress. If no doula, make sure that he or other support person communicates that he is taken care of, both emotionally and physically.
5. When you are coaching appropriate advocacy skills, you may wish to **discuss indirect and direct strategies** to getting what you want in the hospital system.

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During The Birth

1. Now imagine how this comes into play in an advocacy situation at the hospital. **The medical hierarchy is dominated by male communication principles** even if the physician is female. Midwives may have a more female gendered communication style.

You know you have to **appease to the doctor's status and keep his or her sense of personal power intact** as you ask them to do something the system does not naturally encourage them to do. Especially when this is with a doctor who is not used to negotiating or having to answer questions and ponder alternatives with patients.

The doula has the opportunity to influence the conversation so it is not seen as a “challenge to authority” but as a desire to understand the physician's recommendations more fully. It is a good idea to figure out how to use your natural female gender style to negotiate, and when male strategies are more appropriate (and have dad use them).

2. **You and mom are the primary relationship builders** with nurses and other staff. Both of you naturally know how to connect, especially with other women.

3. **Your job is to build rapport with nurses** to make it easier for Dad to enter that relationship when needed. The doula has an opportunity to establish the tone.