

Why you want to book Antenatal Classes.

Childbirth is full of wonderment, excitement, joy, trepidation and a huge dose of the unknown.... how am I going to cope? will my partner support me in the way I need? Do I actually have options, can I say no? What if I can't do this? how does my body make breastmilk, can I sleep safely with my baby next to me? What is involved with an epidural? How can I have a natural birth? Do I have to give birth in hospital? Do I need to even need to attend antenatal classes?? These questions and soooooo many more will be answered during antenatal classes - there is a huge list of benefits and positives for you and your partner or support person. Janine Gard, a Diploma Qualified Birth Educator with 16 years experience facilitating antenatal classes, explains why you should be eager and excited to sign up as part of your pregnancy journey and asks you to come with all the curly questions, you no doubt have.

First and foremost, meeting new people, making new friends and creating a support network with others that are due around the same time as yourself is a huge reason people sign up for antenatal classes. Family may be some distance away and while they may stay for a short time after your baby is born, it's always great to have a group of people close by, that understands what you are going through, someone to ask questions and bounce ideas around with. Coffee groups are a huge support network for new parents, others that understand what it's like to only have 4 hours sleep the night before or regale the time your wee one had a full explosion that required a bath at 3 in the morning and a full change of bedding and clothes! It's also a great place for your partner to catch up with the blokes, debriefing the labour, discussing the latest baby' gadget they've seen online and sharing their hunting and fishing stories.

Another fantastic reason is, so you can learn about the labour and birthing process, all your options and allay any fears or worries you may have. Gard has taught over 3000 parents and this is the hottest topic of conversation and most likely yours too? Understanding what happens to your body and your baby's, during the labour and birthing journey may alleviate some of your fears and worries. You will learn tools helping you cope, relax and keep calm which will make your labour easier to cope with - and let's face it, who doesn't want an easier, faster birth? Lots of parents are empowered to learn that they will have options during this too. While Gard says 'some parents are apprehensive about asking questions, she insists it's goods to ask and, it's okay to ask questions as most will have some kind of impact on the labour and birth and you can't make an informed decision without knowing all the information. Permission is always required from the Mum, more often or not, as verbal consent but in some cases written consent needs to be obtained for certain interventions. Just knowing that you don't have to say 'yes' is quite often powerful, and in many cases, you may have other options you can try first (and what these options are) or instead of maybe what's been suggested. This gives you the power and control back to you, knowing it's your body and your birth helps greatly.

Gaining information about medical interventions and natural and medical pain relief options may also be something you will want to know all about. A lot of mothers are worried about how much it's actually going to hurt and their level of pain tolerance. No doubt you have seen reality TV programs showing people giving birth, screaming and yelling their heads off making it look terrifying and scary. Labour hurts and it is hard work, but, there are multiple natural pain coping techniques that you will learn about during antenatal classes to help boost hormones that are released during labour to support you to cope with the pain. And if you choose, or need medical pain relief there are several options available. Learning the pros and cons, when you can have them, how they are administered and how they may affect you and your baby is hugely important, this is one area you will want to have sound knowledge about.

Not everything you've heard about labour and birth is true! Let's talk about misconceptions, myths and old wives tales, there are so many fallacies surrounding labour and birth, you may have picked these up from the internet, well-meaning friends and family, even work colleagues have been known to share some doozies!

Clearing these up with a trusted birth educator can help you feel more at ease. Myths such as 'you'll need to harden your nipples with a toothbrush before breastfeeding' 'everyone poops during labour' 'your birth will be like your Mum's' 'your waters will break before you go into labour' these are just a small examples of what Gard has heard over the years and none of them are likely. Make sure you are getting factual, evidence-based information is critical to help ease your mind.

Support.... one of the biggest advantages during labour and birth that you will be thankful for. Antenatal classes will give your partner or support person the tips and tools they need to help and support you during labour along with giving them insight to what's really happening. Some partners really have no idea of what you are going through during pregnancy let alone what may happen during labour! A great Birth Educator will include tips and tools to educator and empower your support person to be the best help they can be with encouraging words, practical support such as massage and pressure points, how to keep you relaxed and calm while looking after themselves too, along with letting them know it's okay if you just need them to sit quietly in the corner and not disturb you.

Plus it's a great way to spend quality time with your partner and learning together, perhaps making it a date night where you can grab takeaways on the way home while discussing the night's topics! Win/win!

Creating a safe and comfortable birthing space for you to labour and birth in is notably important as well as this can affect how many people will labour. Gard says 'you use the same hormones to birth your baby as you use when you make love' so it makes sense spending a bit of time while pregnant, discussing what you might need to help you feel comfortable is crucial, such as dimming the lights, music playing and massage and nurturing touch are great for rocking these wonderful hormones. During Antenatal classes, time should be spent on learning what you can and can't bring in to the hospital or birthing unit with you, where to go, is there an after-hours entrance, are there any restrictions, what to pack and where can you heat your wheat-bag!

Coping with unexpected outcomes, not a subject that we really want to think about but another significant topic that will be covered during classes. Many of us deal with unexpected outcomes on a daily or weekly basis and labour is no different. While you lead maternity carer will have an idea of how your labour might progress, they don't have a crystal ball. The majority of uncomplicated pregnancies have uncomplicated labour but it's always a good idea to have a plan in case things need to be modified. Antenatal classes will give you confidence knowing that if your labouring or birthing situation changes you can and will cope because you have learned all your options, possibilities and outcomes along with knowing how to ask questions so you can make informed decisions.

A large portion of your antenatal class should be dedicated to postnatal topics. Quite often parents will be focusing on the birth but Gard says classes should be including these equally important topics too, such as breastfeeding, expressing and alternative options for feeding your baby and what's right for you as a family, how to make a safe bed for your little one, how to bathe your baby, what's normal and not and when to seek medical advice. Physical and psychological changes you will go through after your baby and what to expect, postnatal depression and anxiety, reliable support services and local community groups. Parenting can be daunting, nothing will truly prepare you for bringing your wee one home and the transition you will go through but the more information you have, the better prepared you will be along with knowing who you can turn to if needed.

When you are looking for antenatal classes ensure they are taught by professionals, someone who has specific qualifications to be facilitating these classes, make sure they have a clear understanding of the latest updates, research and keep up to date regularly by attending work-shops, seminars, webinars and professional development forums and are able to articulate antenatal and postnatal education in a clear, fun, friendly manner. Checking their reviews and feedback is also pertinent, a great place to look for these are their Facebook page, google reviews and their website or referrals from friends, family and your own LMC.

Not all antenatal classes are the same, not all educators are the same, find one that feels right and fits your philosophy, your needs and wants. Classes are generally offered in different formats such as 6-7 week classes, One on One sessions and weekend intensive classes. They don't have to be face to face either, there are live, interactive online classes for those that would like to learn and engage with others from the comfort of their home or online classes that offer workbooks supported by videos that you can do at your own pace. Birth Educators should be delivering all this information in a unbiased way, they should not be sharing their own opinion or thoughts on topics as this is about educating and empowering parents-to-be to make their own decisions and take their own path with their birthing and parenting journey.

For information about Antenatal Classes with Janine Gard check out From Bellies to Babies Antenatal & Postnatal Classes www.hbantenatal-classes.co.nz or phone 022 637 0624.

I'd love you to join me, Sign up today!

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