

Review from Birth Magazine
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Understanding Birth: A Comprehensive Guide & Free Facilitator's Guide (2nd Edition) & Understanding Birth Express DVD (2nd Edition)

InJoy Birth & Parenting Education, 2009
DVD \$449.95

Available also in PowerPoint and See What You Read formats

Understanding Birth 2nd Edition is an evidence based, empowering video that will be a useful teaching tool both for use in small segments in your birth classes or while educating a woman on bed rest in her own home. Whether you use the six Lamaze Healthy Birth Practices or the Mother-Friendly Childbirth Initiative as your basic outline, their principles are represented throughout with information, parent comments and births. The strength of *Understanding Birth* lies in both the information and the user-friendly format.

The DVD consists of eight stand-alone chapters: Understanding Pregnancy, Understanding Labor, Christina's Birth, Understanding Comfort Techniques, Understanding Medical Procedures, Understanding Cesarean Birth, Understanding Newborns and Understanding Postpartum. The total viewing time for the video is 120 minutes, and thankfully it is divided into chapters and subheadings that identify the pertinent information you may want to select and show your classes.

Attention to adult learning theory is evident throughout this film. Descriptive images change constantly to highlight the information being presented. Chapters range from 11 minutes 56 seconds for Christina's Birth to 26 minutes 51 seconds for Understanding Medical Procedures. Within each chapter, if you choose scenes instead of playing the entire video from start to finish, you will also get a listing of subheadings that you can show independently of other topics in the chapter.

The information is presented in well-chosen words, and concise, easy-to-understand language. Views of real women and men living through pregnancy, birth and postpartum validate the messages. Common themes of empowerment include women's innate wisdom and telling the view to "trust your body". As parents share their experiences, their words reflect the knowledge that birth is healthy.

It's really important for women to know that they can trust their bodies to do what they need to do; that women's bodies are made for this and that birth is a natural process – not a medical procedure. I really had to dig deep inside myself to know that I had that strength and it is really important thing for women to realize that everybody has this – that they can do it. (Anissa, mother and nurse)

"Instinctively he did everything and I didn't have to do anything" were the words of a mother describing first breastfeeding. Women labor in many different positions of their own choosing, and are shown lying down only when fatigued or receiving epidural analgesia. One mother finds that forward leaning positions are the most comfortable so we see her at home and in the hospital leaning over various types of furniture and birth balls. Birth plans are recommended, and changing health care providers when the mother's birth plan doesn't match the provider's standard of care is also recommended. Birth centers and home birth are not discussed. The practitioner is referred to generically as "health care provider" or "doctor or midwife".

Informed consent and refusal are another common theme, especially in Chapter 3, Understanding Medical Procedures. The chapter begins with the instruction in decision-making using the acronym BRAIN for benefits, risks, alternatives, trusting you intuition, and asking “what if I don’t do it now?” Information on each medical intervention and medication is given in the order of benefits, risks, and alternatives. Reasons for induction include that the mother is too far past due date, water break without contractions and medically it is too dangerous for mother and/or baby to continue pregnancy. The cascade of interventions that can follow use of epidural analgesia are described adequately.

Medications are also discussed in the order of benefits, risks and alternatives. The benefits of letting “your body dictate when labor should start” are helpful, and many of the mothers speak of their experiences as they acknowledge the importance of letting labor start on its own. Happily, Cytotec is not one of the medications presented for induction. The use of Pitocin and the inherent risks should make parents more cautious about asking for induction for social reasons. One mother uses narcotic analgesia for pain relief – a method that is no longer very common. Given the increasing use of epidurals today, it is pleasing to see balanced information when other choices are presented so well.

Evidence-based information is another common theme. Reasons for induction and cesarean section are limited to those supported by research. The risks without substantial benefit for episiotomy are clearly described. For the third edition of this video, I would suggest that it advises that the mother should obtain a second opinion if her provider recommends a cesarean section.

In summarizing my impressions, an important aspect of this video is that I didn’t find myself yelling at the television admonishing women, “Don’t do that!” Many time birth videos make me cringe at the choices being made. Instead, I bathed in the sweet words of the mothers and fathers as they worked with their normal births, and the words of caring supportive fathers were music to my ears. Understanding Birth is graphically and educationally a video that can be adapted to many teaching styles, and will be a valuable addition to the childbirth educator’s and practitioner’s library.

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