

There Is Such a Thing as a Stupid Question

Category: Birth

written by Jill Rovitzky Black | December 19, 2024

My memories of the Lamaze-esque childbirth preparation classes my husband and I took are sketchy—not surprising, given that the baby I delivered is 30 years old. Yet even as I hoarded every potentially useful snippet of obstetric information with the frenetic energy of a squirrel facing a harsh winter, a lot of the tidbits the instructor dispensed slipped by me for one simple reason: I was incapable of staying awake for the duration of a class.

This became apparent when I was in labor. Coaching me through the contractions, my husband kept urging me to imagine turning red lights to green. “What the hell are you babbling about,” I asked in confusion and annoyance.

“You know, the red and green lights,” he repeated. “Remember? From the classes?”

No, I did not remember, having napped through that portion of the curriculum.

In my defense, the lapses were inevitable. My commute from the suburbs to the city meant leaving home before 7:00 a.m. to beat traffic, and even while pregnant I worked well into the evening. Although weary, I managed to stay reasonably attentive through the class lectures and videos. But then they’d dim the lights and we expectant mothers would lower our cumbersome selves onto cushioned mats for the relaxation training intended to prepare us to manage the “discomfort” of childbirth. Drifting off to the instructor’s all-too-soothing voice, I missed the how-to of relaxation.

But the final class, a field trip to the hospital’s labor and delivery floor, remains crystal clear, probably because humiliation, even near-miss humiliation, sears itself into the brain. The instructor apologized that we couldn’t visit a labor room. They were all occupied on this unusually busy evening.

I shot my hand up, then quickly pulled it down when I realized I was about to refute the maxim “there are no stupid questions.” When, I had intended to ask, were they not busy? Because, of course, that’s when I would show up.

Although I am a transplant from the Midwest, in that moment, I had defaulted to thinking like a New Yorker, reflexively trying to leverage knowledge and strategy—useful skills to score a reservation at a popular restaurant or mail a package when lines are shortest. But you unless you’re a candidate for a scheduled C-section or induction, you can’t plan to go into labor at the most convenient time. The baby is going to come when the baby is going to come—which may be the most important childbirth lesson of all.

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