

Shekinah Birthing Co.

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EFT FOR THE “GOOD PATIENT” SYNDROME: How to Reclaim Your Authority & Your Voice

When I was pregnant with my second child, I had to confront a truth about myself that I didn't like. That truth was simply this: *I like approval*. That's not particularly earth-shattering, I know, nor is it necessarily a bad thing. However, I realized that in my previous birth, this trait of seeking approval had played out as an abdication of my own authority.

In order to be a 'good patient' (and a good daughter too: my mom was my labor support person, and she has rules about these things!), I submitted. Instead of retaining my own power and will, I became passive and allowed procedures and medications to be used that I did not want.

I also surrendered my voice. I knew I didn't want these things, and I knew why they were not a good idea, but I allowed them anyway. I did not advocate well for myself and my baby. I was silent when I needed to speak up. After no more than a token protest—if that—I said 'okay' (or I said nothing) when I really meant 'NO.'

Years later, while working as a childbirth educator and doula, I spoke with countless women who expressed similar frustrations with themselves. Sadly, I also worked with women who fell prey to these same self-defeating behaviors, in spite of all their efforts to change them (and my own efforts to facilitate a different outcome).

Why do we do this? Why do women allow themselves to become passive and silent, during one of the most important times in their lives?

It's true that there are physiological reasons for many of our behaviors in birth. But while other mammal mothers will snarl and snap at a stranger, and may even warn away a beloved and trusted human if they are overly disturbed during labor, we seem to be far more likely to snarl at loved ones and passively submit to strangers!

I suspect that it's not biology that is betraying us. It's social programming. Consider these questions:

- *Were you punished as a child when you were disobedient? When you had an opinion about what you wanted? When you spoke out against a parent or figure of authority?*
- *Did you crave approval as a sign that you were loved? Did you learn to be agreeable and to deny or repress your own wants and needs, in order to get approval?*
- *Were you taught that 'good girls' are sweet, courteous, obedient and/or thoughtful of others, no matter what the provocation or cost to self?*
- *Were you required to submit without question to direction or orders from figures of authority (parents, relatives, doctors, teachers, clergy)?*

These limits and strictures, along with other, similar messages, are often programmed into little girls by well-meaning parents and family members. And our culture reinforces them, even for adult women.

Think about it. An assertive woman who stands in her power and communicates her needs and wishes firmly, without apology, is frequently perceived very negatively. Men and other women, threatened by her behavior, often label such a woman “unfeminine,” believe that she is being inappropriate or “difficult,” or even refer to her as a bitch. You may have participated in this condemnation and judgment in the past. This is one way our culture enforces conformity to social norms, and few women of childbearing age will have missed a lesson or two of this type.

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So how can we come to birth, ready to advocate well for ourselves and stand in our power? How can we do this, knowing that strong, non-compliant women are outside of the comfort zone for a great many people in this culture?

Clearly, we need to shift our own beliefs first! Try these practices, which will help you identify and resolve inner conflicts and unhelpful mental dialogue. Once you have worked on this issue a bit, begin to use appropriate assertiveness in your everyday life. *As you live, so you labor!*

PRACTICE ONE:

There's a little book that I love called *Sense and Sensibility in Childbirth*, written by Judith Herzfeld. In it, there is a page entitled, "A Mother's Labor and Delivery Repertoire" which lists some appropriate statements for use by mothers in labor. I used to read the list to my doula clients and to my childbirth classes. The most common responses were squirming discomfort or lowered and averted gazes.

Here is a partial transcript of that wonderful page in *Sense and Sensibility in Childbirth*. Read these perfect words and phrases silently to yourself. Next, speak them aloud, nice and slowly. Then speak them aloud again, while envisioning a situation where you are saying this to a doctor, nurse, support person or family member during your labor.

Pay attention to your inner dialogue and your body sensations as you read and speak these words. Also notice your tone of voice during this practice.

Sample Phrases from "A Mother's Labor And Delivery Repertoire"

paraphrased from *Sense and Sensibility in Childbirth* by Judith Herzfeld

In response to a proposed intervention or exam: "Why?" "What for?" "Maybe later." "Not now." "We'll see."

In response to intervention or exam: "Stop." "Wait." "Slow." "Careful."

In response to interference: "Shhh." "Quiet." "Go away." "Stop it."

If asked to justify something: "Because." "I just do." "I just don't."

Any time: "I need to..." "I am going to..." (As in, "I need to walk now." "I am going to push when I am ready." "I am changing positions now." "I need you to leave the room.")

According to Ms. Herzfeld, there are also things a woman should *never* say during her labor. Practice reading and then speaking the phrases in the "Never" list as you did, above. Again notice the feelings and sensations these statements create in your body. Note your tone of voice and your internal dialogue too.

Never: "May I...?" "Can I...?" (As in, "May I use the tub now?" "Can I squat?" "May I take these belts off?" "Can I change positions?")

Advanced: Once you have made some progress with Practice Two (*below*), stand in front of a mirror and try the advanced version. Look into your eyes and repeat the words and phrases above, calmly and assertively. When you can meet your own gaze and receive your words as authentic and carrying the weight of personal authority, others will be more likely to take you seriously and to offer the respect you deserve.

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PRACTICE TWO:

Time for some EFT, to help you clear the submissive programming that no longer serves you. If you're not familiar with EFT, you can download a Tapping Points sheet from my website, www.areyoutapping.com.

While tapping on the Karate Chop point on either hand, repeat a Set-Up Phrase three times. Tap one or more rounds through the tapping points while repeating a Reminder Phrase.

Use Set-Up Phrases that really resonate with you. Feel free to "tweak" my wording to suit you best. If you find that one or more of the phrases makes you uncomfortable, that's a good cue that something about the phrase is triggering an issue you can clear with EFT.

The power of EFT lies in tapping on your true feelings, which you may judge as negative or wrong, bad or even unsafe. While it's true that EFT can help you to "tap in the positive," **first** you need to release the "charge" or energy disruption by tapping on what you perceive as negative. If you skip directly to the positive, you may have some minimal successes but it's unlikely that you'll resolve the root issue that's causing the problem. Until you address the root cause, the issue tends to reappear.

SAMPLE PHRASES:

Set-Up: *Even though I become a doormat and give up my authority, I love and accept myself anyway.*

Reminders:

Round 1: I become a doormat

Round 2: I give up my authority

Set-Up: *Even though I have these self-defeating reactions when I'm dealing with people in authority, I deeply and completely accept myself.*

Reminders:

Round 1: These self-defeating reactions to authority

Round 2: I give up my own authority

Round 3: I don't know how to stand in my power

Set-Up: *Even though I'm afraid to speak up for myself, I love and accept myself anyway.*

Reminders:

Round 1: I'm afraid to speak up for myself

Round 2: People might not like it if I speak up

Round 3: I'm afraid I might get into trouble if I speak up

Round 4: People might not like me if I speak up

Round 5: I might not like me if I speak up!

Set-Up: *Even though I like approval and will sacrifice anything to get it and keep it, I love and accept myself anyway.*

Reminders:

Round 1: I really like approval

Round 2: I need approval

Round 3: I crave approval

Round 4: I will give up almost anything to get approval

Round 5: I sacrifice myself and my own needs to get approval

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Set-Up: *Even though <someone> taught me to be polite and obedient, and s/he would be horrified/angry if I <?>, I deeply and completely accept myself.*

NOTE: Replace <someone> with the name of whomever taught you this behavior. If more than one person contributed to this teaching, this may take several rounds (one on each person). The <?> should be replaced with a word or phrase illustrating some behavior that would particularly upset this person. For example, "Even though my grandma taught me to be polite and obedient, and she would be horrified if I 'talked back' to a doctor,..." Or, "Even though my father taught me to be polite and obedient, and he would be angry if I said 'No' to something an expert suggested,..."

Reminders:

Round 1: <Someone> taught me to be polite and obedient

Round 2: <Someone> would be horrified/angry if I <?>

Round 3: I don't want to disappoint <someone>

Round 4: I don't want to make <someone> angry

Round 5: <Someone>'s approval is important to me

Set-Up: *Even though I was taught to be respectful of authority, and I'm polite even when people don't treat me with respect, I love and accept myself anyway.*

Reminders:

Round 1: I was taught to be respectful

Round 2: I was taught to be respectful of authority

Round 3: I must respect others even if they don't treat me with respect... or else!

Set-Up: *Even though I must be polite and respectful even when other people don't treat me well-- I must not deserve any respect!-- I love and accept myself anyway.*

Reminders:

Round 1: Apparently I don't believe that I deserve respect

Round 2: I treat others well even when they treat me badly

Round 3: Everyone deserves respect but me

Round 4: Everyone deserves to be treated well, but not me

Round 5: I've been acting like I don't deserve respect

Round 6: I've been polite to people who treat me without respect

Set-Up: *Even though I want to be polite and be a "good patient," and those strategies don't always serve me well, I deeply love and accept myself anyway.*

Reminders:

Round 1: I want to be polite

Round 2: I want to be a good patient

Round 3: I don't want to cause trouble or make a scene

Round 4: That strategy hasn't always served me well

Round 5: I'd like to advocate for myself and my baby with strength and compassion

Set-Up: *Even though I'm afraid to claim my own power and authority, I deeply and completely accept myself.*

Reminders:

Round 1: I'm afraid to claim my own power

Round 2: I'm afraid to be my own authority

Round 3: I'm afraid of that responsibility

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Set-Up: *Even though I'm anxious about buckling if they challenge me, I deeply and completely accept myself.*

Reminders:

Round 1: I'm afraid I'll buckle if they challenge me

Round 2: I'm not sure I can be my own authority

Round 3: In the past, I've buckled when someone challenged me

Set-Up: *Even when I am afraid and out of my comfort zone, I deeply and completely accept myself.*

Reminders:

Round 1: I'm afraid and I am still my own authority

Round 2: I'm out of my comfort zone and I am still my own authority

Round 3: I am still my own authority even when I'm scared

Set-Up: *Even when I'm on their home turf and I feel intimidated, I deeply and completely accept myself.*

Reminders:

Round 1: I'm uncomfortable on their home turf

Round 2: I feel intimidated on their turf

Round 3: I'm uncomfortable but I still know me and my baby better than they do

Round 4: I feel intimidated, but maybe I can still advocate well for both of us

Set-Up: *Even when someone tries to intimidate me and I feel the old programming kicking in, I deeply and completely accept myself.*

Reminders:

Round 1: I feel the old programming kicking in

Round 2: I feel intimidated and afraid to speak up

Round 2: I'm afraid but I want to keep my voice and my courage

Round 3: I'm afraid but I want to stand in my power now

Round 4: I'm afraid but I am the expert on me and my baby

Round 5: I'm afraid but I can still speak for myself and my baby

Round 6: I'm afraid but I can still be my own authority

Set-Up: *Even though <someone> would not approve, and that makes me sad, I deeply and completely accept myself.*

Reminders:

Round 1: <Someone> would not approve

Round 2: It makes me sad to disappoint them (or It makes me anxious to think of them being angry)

Round 3: I can still approve of myself when I speak up for me and my baby

Set-Up: *Even though others may not approve, I can still approve of myself when speak up for myself and my baby, and I deeply and completely accept myself.*

Reminders:

Round 1: Others may not approve when I speak up

Round 2: I can still approve of myself when I speak up for me and my baby

You can learn more about EFT from the EFTUniverse website, www.eftuniverse.com, and from Shekinah Birthing Co.'s website, www.areyoutapping.com.