

# KNOWING YOUR RIGHTS IN THE BIRTH ROOM

## A Free Guide by Mooncradle Matrescence



Pregnancy and birth are transformative experiences, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Yet too often, birthing people and even birth professionals themselves may be unsure of what rights exist in the labor and delivery room. This guide is for everyone: expecting parents, partners, doulas, midwives, nurses, obstetricians, and all allies committed to dignified, respectful care.

Our goals are to:

- Clarify the legal and human rights you hold
- Equip you with language and strategies to advocate effectively
- Foster an activist mindset, championing respectful, trauma-informed care for all

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### 1. Your Fundamental Rights

Regardless of venue, hospital, birth center, or home, you retain these nonnegotiable rights

#### 1.1 Informed Consent and Refusal

Definition: You must receive clear information about any procedure or intervention, including benefits, risks, and alternatives, before giving or withholding consent

Right to Refuse: You can decline any intervention, even if it is medically recommended. Your decision cannot be overruled without a court order

#### 1.2 Respectful and Supportive Care

Dignity and Privacy: You have the right to be treated with respect, in privacy, free from verbal, emotional, or physical abuse

No Discrimination: Care must be free from bias based on race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, disability, or language

#### 1.3 Choice of Companions

Support Person: You may have one or more people (partner, friend, family, doula) of your choice present throughout labor and birth

Freedom to Change: You can change or add a support person at any time unless it poses a documented safety risk

#### 1.4 Provider and Facility Selection

Right to Transfer: You can request transfer to another provider or facility if you feel your rights or safety are compromised

Second Opinions: You may seek second opinions without penalty

### 2. Informed Consent in Practice

Information is power. Here's how to ensure you truly understand what is proposed

#### Ask Open Questions

- What is the purpose of this procedure
- What are the risks if we do it If we don't

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### Listen for Coercion

- Words like "You must" or "You have no choice" are red flags
- You deserve neutral language not pressure

### Take Time When Possible

- Even in active labor you can request a moment to breathe process or confer with your support person

### Document Your Wishes

- A clear concise birth plan can guide your team. Provide a printed or digital copy to all caregivers

## 3. Common Interventions and Your Right to Decline

Below are frequently offered procedures. You have the right to accept, modify or refuse each one

<u>Intervention</u>	<u>Typical Reason</u>	<u>Your Right</u>
Vaginal Exams	Assess dilation and labor progress	Decline or limit frequency
Artificial Rupture of Membranes (AROM)	Speed labor	Refuse or discuss timing and benefits
Induction (e.g., Pitocin)	Post-term, medical concerns	Ask about alternatives and timing
Continuous Fetal Monitoring	Track baby's heart rate	Opt for intermittent monitoring
Episiotomy	Prevent tearing	Refuse. Active pushing with support often suffices
Cesarean Birth	Emergency or elective reasons	Discuss risk recovery and support roles

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### 4. Advocating for Yourself and Others

#### 4.1 Powerful Phrases

- "Please explain the benefits and risks before we proceed"
- "I need a minute to discuss with my support person"
- "I understand your recommendation but I decline at this time"

#### 4.2 Using Your Birth Plan

Tool Not Contract: Share it early. Review with each shift change

Keep It Visible: A clipboard poster or digital note in the room

#### 4.3 When to Escalate

If your requests are ignored, ask to speak with the charge nurse, patient advocate, or midwife on call

Document date, time, and names of caregivers involved

### 5. Recognizing and Preventing Obstetric Violence

Obstetric violence is any demeaning coercive or nonconsensual act during pregnancy labor or delivery

#### 5.1 Red Flags

- Procedures performed without explanation or consent
- Shaming language about your body pain level or choices
- Physical restraint or undue force

#### 5.2 Prevention Strategies

Educate Yourself: Read evidence-based sources

Build Your Team: Hire a doula. Involve a patient advocate

Practice Assertiveness: Role-play phrases with your partner or doula

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### 7. About Mooncradle Matrescence

Mooncradle Matrescence is a birth justice centered practice that offers full spectrum doula care across New Jersey, New York, and parts of Pennsylvania. Virtual support is also available to clients anywhere. We support families through every stage of their journey, including pregnancy, birth, postpartum, abortion, and loss, by providing education, advocacy, and compassionate care.

Founded by Clarissa Alves, a Bronx-born mother of two rainbow babies, Mooncradle Matrescence is rooted in lived experience and evidence-based training. After navigating miscarriage, hyperemesis, exclusive breastfeeding, and trauma-informed healing, Clarissa created this space so no one has to go through these seasons alone or uninformed.

### Services We Offer

Birth doula support for labor in hospitals, homes, and birth centers  
Bereavement doula care for miscarriage, stillbirth, and infant loss  
Donation-based support for abortion and termination for medical reasons  
The Matrescence Network for continued care through lactation, postpartum, and beyond  
Free tools and education that help families understand their rights and make informed decisions

### What We Believe

Informed consent and bodily autonomy are essential  
Care should be accessible to all, especially during loss or abortion  
Community and collaboration serve families best  
Support must be evidence-based and trauma-informed  
Every outcome deserves respect

Mooncradle Matrescence is proud to support BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, disabled, and all birthing people with care that centers their voice and protects their rights.

To learn more, visit [mooncradlematrescence.com](https://mooncradlematrescence.com) or Mooncradle Matrescence on other platforms

Empowerment begins with knowledge.  
Share this guide and amplify birth  
justice for all