

The 10 Lines That Help

The 10 Lines That Help — *what to say in the birth room, and why*

1. **“I’m not going anywhere.”** The simplest true thing, said early. Fear peaks when a woman feels alone in it. This line doesn’t fix anything — it removes the worst of it. Say it once, properly, and mean it.
2. **“Tell me what you need right now.”** Not “are you okay?” — one small, specific ask. It gives her the decision, keeps your focus on this moment, and stops you guessing. Specific questions get specific answers; specific answers get her what she actually needs.
3. **“You’re doing this. I’ve got the rest.”** The division of labour, in one line. She leads the birth; you run the room — the midwife, the clock, the phone calls, the tea. This is the sentence that makes you a partner and not a spare part.
4. **“You can feel the bed beneath you.”** Naming what’s verifiably true anchors her in the present. Her mind can’t race into fear and land on what you’re saying at the same time.
5. **“With every breath, you might feel more at ease.”** Not a command — an offer. Her stressed mind can resist “relax!” but it can confirm “you might feel more at ease” in her own body. You’re not telling her to do anything; you’re pointing at a door she can walk through.
6. **“Each tightening is a wave that’s bringing our baby closer to us.”** The pain is work, not damage. Give it a meaning that helps her through — that’s not lying about the pain, that’s giving it a job.
7. **“You’re safe. The baby’s safe. We’re exactly where we need to be.”** Stress and birth run on the same wiring and pull in opposite directions. Her body can’t open while her brain is scanning for danger — so give the brain the all-clear, out loud, often.
8. **“The midwife says everything’s on track — nothing needs deciding right now.”** When you ask the right questions of the professionals (how slow is slow? what does that mean?), you get facts you can hand her whole. An informed partner passes on accurate updates; that quiet confidence is catching.
9. **“Whatever you decide now, I’m with you.”** Birth is full of forks in the road. The moment she feels a “wrong” choice has a cost attached — a sigh, a silence, a “just asking” — trust cracks and her body feels it. This line keeps the choice hers, and you on her side either way.
10. **“You’ve got this. And I’ve got you.”** Both halves of the message, in one breath. Her strength acknowledged, her backup named.

The lines that don’t help — *“Just relax.”* (the most useless instruction in the language; it implies she’s doing it wrong) · *“You’re not trying hard enough.”* (nobody needs this, ever) · *“Is it nearly over?”* (ask the midwife instead) · *“Calm down.”* (see “just relax”) · *“Other women do this all the time.”* (true, useless, and it makes her feel like a problem).

From Men, Love & Birth — the book about being present at birth that your partner wants you to read, by Mark Harris. More at menlovebirth.com