KEEPING THE SACRED IN CHILDBIRTH PRACTICES

Integrating Navajo Cultural Aspects into Obstetric Care

by

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Map of Navajo Nation
Objectives

• Using a model, identify dimensions of bringing forth a child from the Navajo perspective.
• Discuss the importance of keeping the sacred in Navajo birth practices.
• Identify ways to provide culturally appropriate care to Navajo women who give birth in a hospital.
Navajo World Views: Childbirth

- Child of the Universe
- Couples are expectant
- Keeping the peace
- Keeping strong
- Roles of the family
- Spirituality
Keeping the Sacred in Childbirth

• When Female and Male Waters Come Together
• When being with child
• When the baby nudges you
• When the waters of birth come

• When the baby emerges
• When the voice of the child is heard
• When the beautiful one comes into your hands
When Female and Male Waters Come Together

- Re-live creation
- Respect for K’e (relationships & order)
- Male light united with female light
- Father Sky, Mother Earth united in love
- One heart to one heart
When Being With Child

**Do’s**
- Talk with ‘corn pollen’ sprinkled words
- Have ceremonies
- Keep thoughts good
- Say dawn prayers daily
- Keep the peace

**Don’ts**
- Argue with partner or others
- Allow bad thoughts to occupy mind for long periods of time
- Scold children
- Talk negatively or with criticism
Navajo Ceremonies for Births

- Blessing way
- Protection way
- Shielding prayers
- Daily rituals
- Native American Church
Navajo Traditional Healing
SONG OF THE HORSE

My feet are made of mirage,
My bridle of strings of the sun.
My mane is like the white lightning.
My tail is like long black rain.
My eyes are big, spreading stars.
My teeth are of the white shell.
My belly is white as dawnlight.
My heart is of everlasting garnet.

--From Blessing Way Chant
When the Baby Nudges you

Do’s

• Eat foods good for baby
• Get up early and walk around
• Have a Blessing way ceremony for a safe delivery
When the Baby Nudges You (cont.)

Don’ts

- Drink milk, take too much salt or eat foods ‘taken away’ by Navajo ceremonies
- Attend funerals or look at deceased person
- Be with sick people or go to crowded places
- Attend chant way rites for sick people
- Look at dead animals (taxidermy trophies)
- Lay around too much
- Tie knots, lift heavy things, weave rugs, make pottery, or kill living things (butcher)
- Prepare layette sets or plans for baby
When the Waters of Birth Come

**Do’s**
- Think about a good delivery
- Have a medicine person do ‘Singing out Baby’ Chant or ‘Unraveling’ song if necessary

**Don’ts**
- Let too many people observe labor (only the helpers)
Earth’s Prayer

From the heart of earth, by means of yellow pollen blessing is extended.
From the heart of Sky, by means of blue pollen blessing is extended.
On top of pollen floor may I there in blessing give birth!
On top of a floor of fabrics may I there in blessing give birth!
As collected water flows ahead of it [the child], whereby blessing moves along ahead of it, may I there in blessing give birth!
Thereby without hesitating, thereby with its mind straightened, hereby with its travel means straightened, thereby without its sting, may I there in blessing give birth!

S.D. Gill – Sacred Words
When the Baby Emerges

Do’s

• Drink corn meal gruel
• Wear juniper seed beads
• Burn cedar or sweetgrass
• Loosen your hair
• Drink herbal tea to relax

• Get in squatting position
• Apply gentle fundal pressure during pushing
• Hold onto sash belt when ready to push
• Drink herbal tea to make womb strong
Sashbelt in Labor Room
Baby Comes Forth
When the Voice of Child is Heard

Do’s

• Bury the placenta
• Drink juniper/ash tea to cleanse your insides
• Drink blue cornmeal gruel
• Breastfeed your baby
• Smear baby’s first stool on your face
• Wrap sash belt around waist for four days after delivery
When the Voice of the Child is Heard

Don’ts

• Drink cold liquids or be in cold draft
• Smell afterbirth blood for too long
• Show signs of displeasure if baby soils on you

• Burn placenta or afterbirth blood fluids
• Have sexual intercourse with your mate for three months after delivery
When the Beautiful One Comes Into Your Hands

Do’s

- Bury umbilical cord in sheep corral, near rug loom or special place
- Massage baby soon after birth
- Give corn pollen and juniper/ash tea to baby for cleansing

- Shake hand with baby soon after birth and call baby by Navajo name
- Make cradle board; mark the direction of growth of tree
- Sponsor ‘First Laugh’ ceremony
- Sponsor shielding way (blackening rite) for baby
When the Beautiful One Comes Into Your Hands (cont.)

Don’ts

• Cut hair until baby talks
• Cover soft spot with fingers
• Cover head with bowl or basket
Care of Expectant Navajo Women

- Mission and values
- Leadership support
- Cultural competence
- Beliefs of expectant couples & family
- Birth environment
Vision for the IHS

“The values of human dignity, honesty, compassion, coupled with shared values of many different tribes and cultures, that have come to be spoken of as “Indian values ‘, of listening, mutual respect, dignity, and harmony must always be at the forefront of what we do and how we do it. We must be professional in all our actions”

Dr. Michael Trujillo
Summary

• Model for cultural sensitivity
• Good business
• Standards of care
• Happy patients
A Child of the Universe

Devin Ryan Wilson
Conclusion

“I’ve learned that when your newly born child holds your little finger in his little fist, that you’re hooked for life.”

--Unknown