



The Future of Childbirth Education

**Brain
Training
for Birth**



Tracy Donegan - Midwife

www.gentlebirth.com

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Meet Tracy



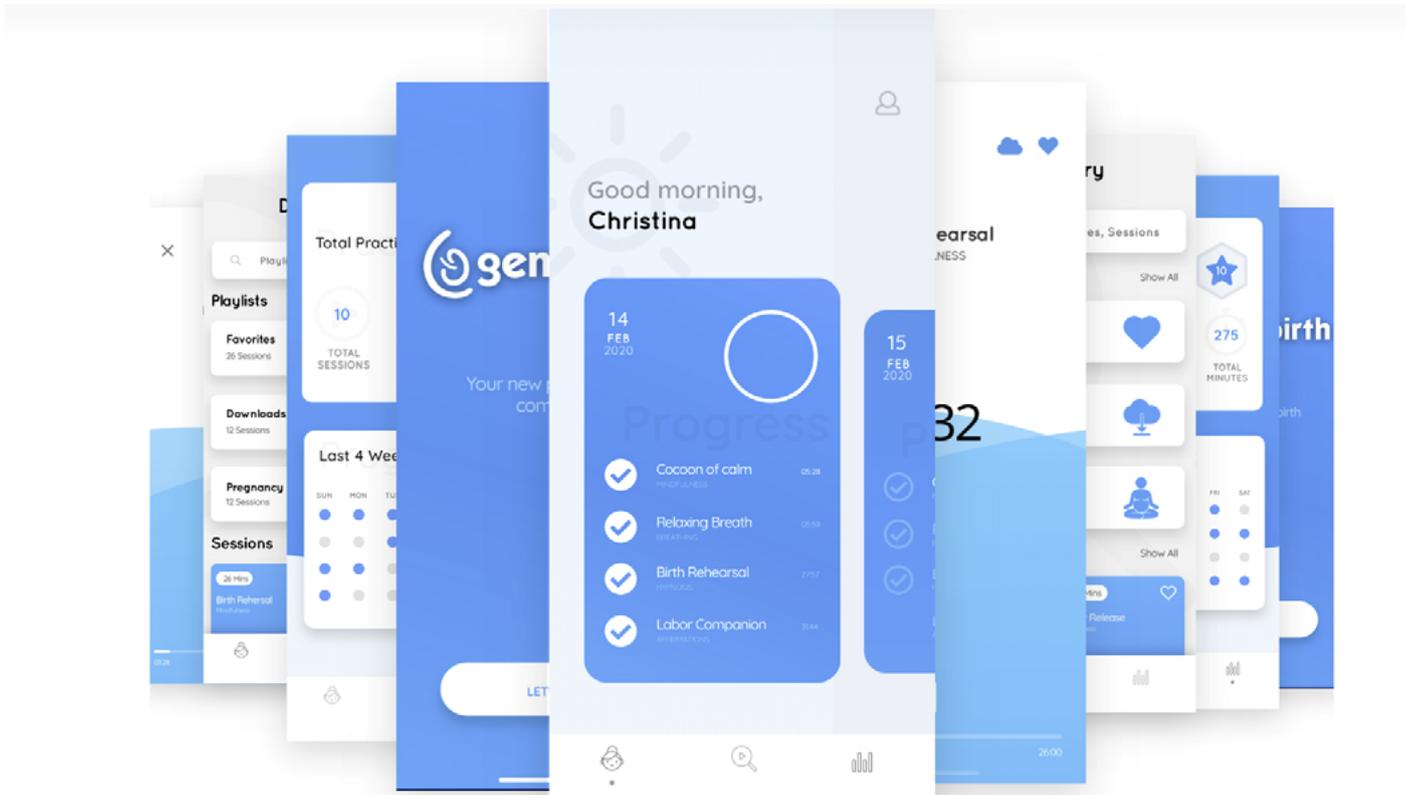
Thank you for taking the time to download the GentleBirth Educator training prospectus -The Future of Childbirth Education. I hope you'll find this information helpful in your professional and personal life. As a motivated, professional passionate birth worker continuing to grow your skills and business can be a challenge. There are so many options and almost too many add on trainings for your birth business. You've done the placenta encapsulation training.... rebozo... Spinning Babies– what's next for you?

If you're like me you want to Inspire your clients, Impact them in positive ways and be Innovative in the ways you reach and teach them. If that sounds like you then you've come to the right place. I'm a birth doula, doula trainer (DONA) and a Midwife. I feel very fortunate to be living my purpose and following my calling to teach. As the Founder of GentleBirth I want to share this information with

birth professionals around the world in a meaningful way that impacts not only your clients but birth professionals themselves. I've been teaching GentleBirth 'brain training for birth' techniques since 2006. GentleBirth continues to grow globally and each year we impact more and more families long after birth. I feel so fortunate to spend my time with some of the most dedicated birth professionals in the world who are committed to positive birth - in whatever form that takes. I want to support YOU in taking the next step to become a successful childbirth educator teaching the most innovative childbirth education program available. Be more than a childbirth educator – be a 'headhacker for birth' and teach GentleBirth's Advanced CBE program - The Future of Childbirth Education

Let's get started!

The GentleBirth App



It's estimated that a pregnant mom will download 3 pregnancy apps. Most provide basic information such as describing how big your baby is and a daily countdown to mom's EDD. The GentleBirth App is the most advanced pregnancy app available for smartphones today and is available for Apple and Android phones.

Based on Mom's individual pregnancy journey the GentleBirth App guides her daily through her recommended brain training.

Daily Brain training includes:

Short meditation sessions

Birth hypnosis

Positive Affirmations

Breathing Techniques

For example a mom who is 16 weeks pregnant will receive very different daily training to a mom at 26 or 36 weeks. Her content is unique to her journey. Content is also tailored for twin moms, VBAC and moms having a planned cesarean. If at any point a mom's plans have to change she simply updates her personal profile and she is presented with daily content relevant to her new circumstances immediately.

Our special circumstances area also includes helpful content for women who are experiencing a miscarriage or who have experienced birth trauma or are currently trying to become pregnant. Birth partners have their own unique worries and stress to manage when preparing for birth so we've included content for male and female life partners. After birth mom will update her profile to receive content for the postpartum period focused on emotional stability and physical recovery. The App contains over 70 recordings from preconception to long into the postpartum period.

App Free Trial

The app is free to trial for 7 days and is \$12.99 per month for premium content (pricing varies depending on location). As an Instructor you'll have continued free access. As you complete your training, the free 7 day trial of the App provides you with an opportunity to connect with parents in your local area and build awareness about the App and your upcoming workshops before you even finish the training.



As childbirth educators our goal is to help parents navigate their way confidently to a positive birth with the best outcomes possible. So let's start with outcomes. Chaillet's 2014 meta-analysis concluded that birth preparation that includes central nervous system strategies (brain based) significantly reduce obstetric intervention more than any other approach which coincidentally mirrors the GentleBirth curriculum. Standard CBE is lacking in cognitive skills for pain coping, emotional regulation and the biology of pain. This meta-analysis led to the development of a 2018 national clinical guideline in Canada - No. 355-Physiologic Basis of Pain in Labor and Delivery: An Evidence-Based Approach to its Management (available online).

Independent Research

In 2017 an Obstetrician in one of Europe's largest maternity units ran a prospective study comparing GentleBirth workshop outcomes to the outcomes of parents attending a traditional hospital class. GentleBirth outperformed the hospital classes in every aspect from satisfaction rates, to induction of labor to breastfeeding. The study's author concluded that elements of the GentleBirth program should be taught in all maternity units. *New 2018 Australian research also suggests that birth preparation similar to GentleBirth has the potential to offer significant cost savings to Institutions as women experience more positive physiologic births with less intervention and less birth trauma.

*Levett KM, Dahlen HG, Smith CA, et al

Cost analysis of the CTLB Study, a multitherapy antenatal education programme to reduce routine interventions in labor BMJ Open 2018;8:e017333.



“Fortune Favors The Prepared Mind”

- Louis Pasteur

House of Cards

I think of birth preparation like building a house. A house will only stand against the elements with a strong foundation and most of the moms and dads attending your classes have ‘foundations’ (beliefs) that are less than ideal when it comes to birth and parenting. Weeks of classes with rich, compelling evidence based information comes toppling down like a house of cards with two words from a care provider - ‘big baby’. GentleBirth ‘brain training’ based curriculum is not just about providing knowledge – it’s about providing the psychological tools to optimize their learning and motivate your clients to choose healthier options for a lifetime. These tools are provided instantly to parents within the unique GentleBirth App (we’re innovating childbirth education with technology too).



You can lead a human to knowledge - but you can't make him think.

Providing evidence based information to parents is only one part of the puzzle and that's what most CBE programs do. But helping parents change the way they think about the information is where GentleBirth exceeds and makes all the difference in how your clients apply this information. The GentleBirth mantra is to become more selective about what we focus on and whenever possible leaning in the direction of more positive thoughts for example **"Is what I'm focused on now making me more excited or more anxious about my baby's birth?"** We have the freedom to choose our emotional state – positive or negative and the physiological conditions that accompany those thoughts that impact the health and wellbeing of mom and baby. The realization that moms and dads are responsible for their emotional state not their OB, doula or best friend brings with it incredible power and freedom. In each moment of each day your clients get to decide how they will react to the stresses of pregnancy, the demands of labor and the journey of parenthood. You're also preparing them for life (after baby) in the most positive way possible.

One of the biggest challenges CBEs and doulas experience is overcoming frustrations that can come with providing evidence based information... your client's OB mentions 'big baby' and it all goes 'out the window'. You try your best to not be attached to outcomes of your clients but sometimes that can be difficult. You wonder why moms and dads aren't 'getting it'. You can help them 'get it' more often by helping parents understand how to reliably access the executive functioning of their brains even when it seems like everything is going 'out the window' and by having an understanding the psychology of risk. As Penny Simkin is often quoted as saying 'she has very good reasons for feeling and behaving the way she does' – what may seem like a strange decision to us may not seem so strange to mom. With GentleBirth you're not just preparing parents for the birth they want - but potentially the birth they don't want. Other CBE programs leave parents to pick up the pieces. No doubt you've done your homework and researched other CBE programs and are starting to see the value of building emotional resilience for parents and it's just as important as the information they learn. GentleBirth excels in supporting emotional wellbeing, which is especially important given the increase in birth trauma. As a doula or midwife the skills you leave parents with after your class stay with them long after your visits have ended. This is probably the time when they need these tools the most as they adjust to the huge transition becoming parents. The double hip squeeze can be incredibly helpful in labor but how will it help a mom trying to latch her new baby at 4am and she wants to quit? I want every parent to leave our classes with life skills – not just labor skills.



You may be aware of the concepts of 'self-determination' or 'self-efficacy' but translating what moms know to be right for them into practice can be quite a gap. Health psychologists now suggest that it's not the information that's provided to clients but how it's presented which influences changes in behavior. For example in your work the way you convey the disadvantages of an induction or a planned cesarean may influence which option your client chooses. You'll learn about 'gain framing' in healthcare and how to reframe routine birth interventions in a way that helps parents see the benefits of spontaneous uninterrupted birth as they connect the dots themselves. That's where the real changes and empowerment happens - the 'aha' moments your clients discover themselves are the most motivating and meaningful.

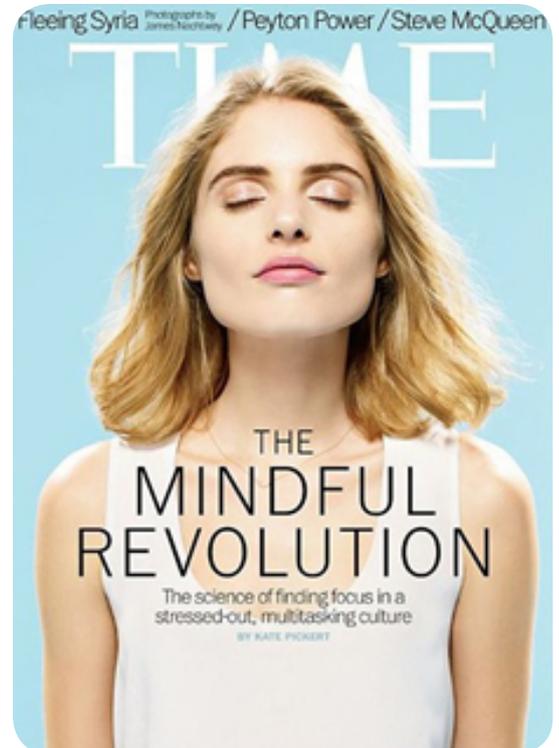
The GentleBirth Instructor training is for committed, dedicated birth professionals who want to go that extra mile. The tradeoffs are that you'll complete the training with a renewed sense of purpose and your excitement ignited or (or reignited) for effective, innovative childbirth education that gets results.

Science of Meditation

Mindfulness is not about crystals, incense or spirit guides. It is now being recognized by HCPs as an effective intervention to promote maternal and infant health.

For many, the word 'mindfulness' brings up images of sitting cross legged in front of a candle or Tibetan singing bowl meditating while silently wrestling with your mind to empty it of all thoughts.

It's not a religion and it requires no special clothing or difficult training. As someone who multitasks in my sleep this all seems like hard work. Sitting still for 5 minutes without your phone... TV...iPad.... can be challenging for many of us. Most of us tend to go through life on auto pilot with our heads in the past reliving a past experience or in the future worrying about what's going to happen. 35 years of research shows measurable physical and psychological benefits. So are you present right now as you're reading this eBook or is your mind jumping to all the things you need to do tomorrow. Can you be present on purpose?



Studies have shown that those who learn mindfulness are less likely to become depressed and experience positive changes in wellbeing. The primary goal is to increase psychological flexibility or what we call "emotional resilience". Resilience is the ability to face and handle life's day to day challenges, with flexibility and adaptability....it's a way to learn how to not sweat the small stuff. (Skills many of us could do with some help on). The capacity to bounce back is innate in the brain, but it's development can be hampered over time by repeated negative responses to stress or trauma.

A recent 2013 study has also demonstrated that a blended mindfulness and skills-based childbirth education intervention was associated with improvements in women's sense of control and confidence in giving birth. "Previous findings that low self-efficacy and high childbirth fear are linked to greater labor pain, stress reactivity, and trauma suggest the observed improvements in these variables have important implications for improving maternal mental health and associated child health outcomes". As doulas, midwives and CBEs we can help families to manage their reactions to the stresses of becoming new parents especially those at risk of perinatal depression.

So much focus is on teaching parents about feeding, sleeping etc...we know that the post partum period is very much a 'lived' experience and no book can prepare parents for what's ahead but as birth professionals we can teach them strategies to cope with the stresses of parenting in a more effective way that improves mental and physical health.....Even as little as 8 minutes a day grows new neural structure..... it's like a muscle and grows with repetition. Research is also emerging that prenatal depression is associated with changes in the brain structure of children born to depressed or anxious moms. Becoming a mom doesn't begin with the first contraction – there are ways you can make this journey more satisfying as you help parents develop their inner resources and build emotional resilience.

A positive birth comes
in many forms and is
defined by the Mother





WITH INTENTION AND YOUR FULL PRESENCE
SLOW DOWN SPEAK SOFTLY, CONNECT

Brain Training for Birth Professionals – Build Your Emotional Resilience Bank Account

For anyone in a caring profession self-care is usually not a priority. The techniques you'll learn during the training won't just change your client's lives – they'll change yours. Birth work can be exhilarating and exhausting, serene and stressful (and that's just one birth!) then for many you go home to your family/friends and stress of non-birth work. Stress management and emotional management techniques are not taught as part of most doula/midwifery training. All care begins with self-care. Some of the world's biggest corporations are embracing mindfulness techniques to reduce stress and improve focus, productivity and creativity even Google has a mindfulness program for staff. Stanford University has now made mindfulness training available for all medical students.

Healthcare professionals including doctors who receive a mindfulness-based intervention for burnout-related symptoms have noted improved job satisfaction and reduced stress levels (Shapiro et al., 2005). Mindfulness can be learned in a short period of time and has a multitude of benefits in a health care setting. (Ludwig & Kabat-Zinn, 2008).

As a birth professional these techniques make you less reactive to distraction while supporting a mother as you develop psychological flexibility and become more present in the moment....not focusing on what dilation mom is at...or what the nurse said about her birth plan....or anticipating what will happen in an hour....you're meeting her breath to breath – in the moment. In Karen Lynn's' Thesis (2005) midwives were interviewed about their perceptions of mindfulness - "The Midwifery (and doula) philosophy is based on being with a woman, and seeing things from her point of view. Mindfulness fits with the philosophy of being a midwife."

One midwife commented that mindfulness "allows for inner peace in the midst of chaos and crisis, helping to bring clarity." Another midwife shared this view of mindfulness promoting clarity "in the context of swirling around, and chaos, around and underneath you."

Avoiding Burnout and Becoming a Mindful Birth Professional

See how often you can catch yourself on autopilot or being mindless today. We've all had the experiences of putting your keys down and now can't find them...or walking into a room and you can't remember what you went in there for....or maybe you put the milk in the microwave today instead of the refrigerator. These are examples of running on autopilot you are so immersed in the next activity or what happened yesterday that you are physically doing the actions but you're not 'there'. You're not present. Some of you may be like me and have too many tabs open at the one time in your brain.

Mindfulness means you are being present on purpose....you're paying attention to what you're doing in this very moment – on purpose and without judgment. You are choosing to be completely absorbed in your current activity....brushing your teeth.....having a shower....washing the dishes....doing the double hip squeeze.

Mindfulness isn't just a nice 'to do' for yourself that makes you feel relaxed. With practice the physical structure of your brain can change in 8 weeks. Being mindful doesn't mean stopping your thoughts. It's about noticing them and accepting them as they are with gentleness and self compassion.

There is a growing body of research in mindfulness and more recently mindfulness in pregnancy and birth preparation.

Cognitive Benefits of Mindfulness in Pregnancy (Dunkan and Barkache's 2010 pilot study)

- More positive emotions
- Emotional resilience (the ability to 'bounce back' and react positively to stressful events).
- Decreased fear.
- Reduced perception of pain.
- Less anxiety
- Less depressed mood
- Increased confidence
- Increased focus and concentration

Benefits of Mindfulness on the Body

- Calms overactive parts of the brain
- Reduces elevated blood pressure
- Improved immune response
- Reduced cholesterol levels
- Reduction of stress hormones levels found in the blood.
- Positive changes in brain chemistry (neurotransmitters such as serotonin, melatonin).
- Changes in the brain structure associated with memory
- Physiological changes in regular meditators are associated with a slowing of the aging process.

Having a drug free birth may require
as much focus as a month in a
monastery.

Focus, attention and mindfulness for
birth are skills that can be developed
with practice.

Learn more at www.gentlebirth.com



Studies show mindfulness practice reduces the risk of depression and increases your 'psychological flexibility' – Dunne et al 2012

(Psychological flexibility = emotional resilience for you and your clients).

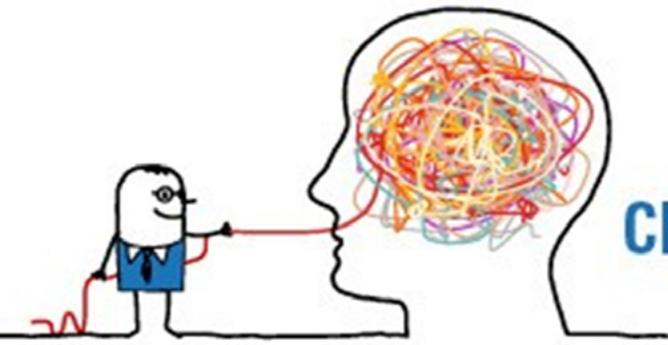
A couple of quotes from the British Journal of Midwifery on Mindfulness in Maternity – July 2013.

"It helped in so many ways; coping with a last minute change of plan and induction of labor. Staying in the moment with each contraction meant I could use breathing to cope with pain and fear. I was more aware of my thoughts and the 'stories' I told myself than I would have been without the practice of mindfulness"

"I was not prepared for the difficulties associated with breastfeeding and mindful breastfeeding helped us to keep going. I have had to make significant changes to my diet as a result of milk protein intolerance and using the 'acceptance' aspect of mindfulness has helped me in not resenting it".



CBT Module



Cognitive behavioural therapy Change How You Feel by Changing How You Think and Behave

“There is Nothing Good or Bad But
Thinking Makes it So”

– Shakespeare

Another self-help coping tool for mums and midwives that is growing particularly in the UK is CBT.

WHAT IS IT?

Cognitive behavior therapy is one of the few forms of psychotherapy that has been scientifically tested and found to be effective in hundreds of clinical trials for many different mental health disorders. CBT is usually more focused on the present, and more problem-solving oriented. In addition, we learn specific 'life' skills that you can use for the rest of your life. These skills involve recognizing distorted thinking, challenging the thinking (is this true or is this just by brain firing off an old program) which ultimately changes behavior. It compliments mindfulness practice really well.

Cognitive behavior therapy is based on the cognitive model: the way we perceive situations influences how we feel emotionally which changes how we behave. For example, one mom might think to herself "breastfeeding seems so hard...none of my friends were able to do it – I don't want to be tied down

at home all day...I don't think it's for me....(and feels discouraged)." Another mother thinks, "I'm really looking forward to breastfeeding...I think it'll be a lovely way to bond with my baby". So it is not a situation itself, *but their thoughts about that situation*. When people are stressed, their perspective is often distorted and their thoughts may be unrealistic. Cognitive behavior therapy helps people identify distorted thoughts and helps them take a step back and evaluate how realistic the thoughts are.

Then they learn to change their distorted thinking. When they think more realistically, they feel better. The emphasis is also consistently on solving problems and initiating behavioral change. Once they learn the tools it's a great self-help tool.



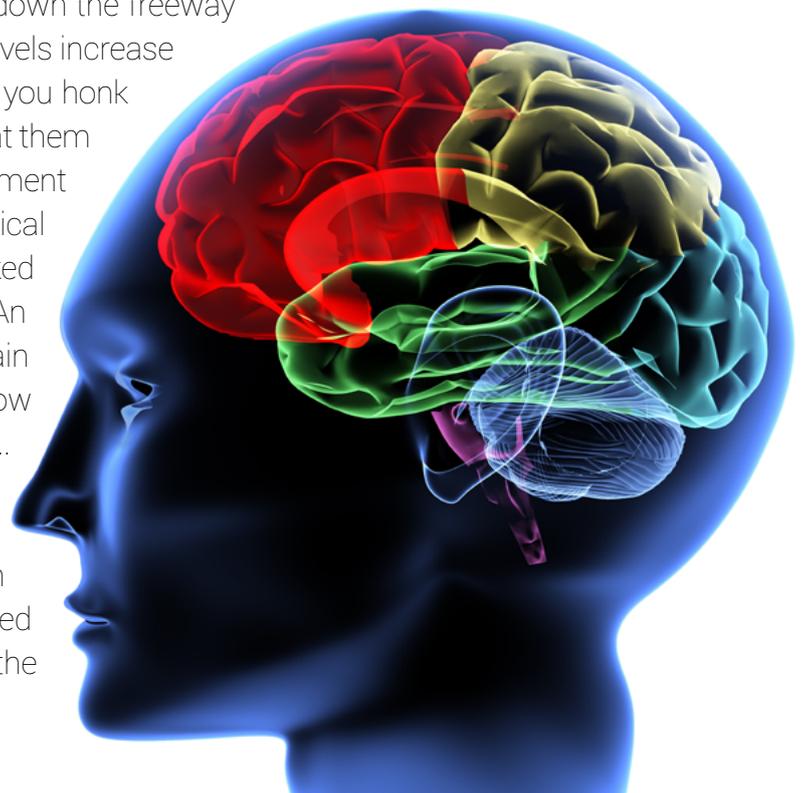
GENTLEBIRTH TIPS

The repetition of the phrase "i'll be screaming for the epidural" increases the likelihood that you'll need one.

Choose a better feeling thought.

Tracy Donegan - Midwife

Imagine you're late to a birth. As you speed down the freeway someone cuts you off in traffic. Your stress levels increase significantly, your heart races... you shake as you honk the horn and maybe even speed up to shout at them or tailgate to 'teach them a lesson'. In that moment of anger you've literally lost your mind. The logical rational part of your brain has been hijacked by your perception of what just happened. An inner conversation is played over and over again as you continue your drive to work about how the other driver is so irresponsible.....selfish..... dangerous.... shouldn't have a license along with a few other swear words... you arrive to the hospital very stressed. Your body and brain are on high alert as you have mentally replayed a 2 second event for the last 15 minutes of the drive to be with your clients.



Not a great start.

Let's try it another way.

Imagine you're late to a birth. As you speed down the freeway someone cuts you off in traffic. Your stress levels increase significantly, your heart races....you shake as you honk the horn and maybe even speed up to shout at them or tailgate to 'teach them a lesson'.

You use a simple 'reframing' technique you learned as part of your GentleBirth Instructor Training and you are able to react to the situation in a far healthier and more rational way.

When you use these techniques your emotional state and therefore your reaction/ behavior is no longer held hostage by your initial reaction to that driver....or something your mother in law said....or a colleague. You've learned how to change that reaction quickly. You are able to choose a new perspective you've 'reframed' that experience and your physiology has in turn reduced that stress reaction and you arrive to meet your clients a lot less stressed and a lot more focused. What a very different start to your support of your clients.

This is a great tool to help your Moms reframe experiences too and take the emotional 'sting' out of a situation.

All of these techniques promote self-directed neuroplasticity. By changing the thoughts you're changing the wiring of your brain. So your emotional brain no longer has the power that it did... It strengthens the executive functioning of your brain...so you can plan better...make better decisions...be more aware of how you're thinking, what you're paying attention to and where your thoughts are focused. These are life changing skills for you and your clients.



"Preparing for a positive birth is not wishful thinking - we call it 'intelligent optimism'.

TRACY DONEGAN

The 2013 Bristol pilot – RCT of CBT for antenatal depression.

Most of the research has been on postnatal depression and its consequences than on prenatal depression but of course prenatal depression can also have adverse effects on both mother and baby. Although there are a number of other studies that begin during pregnancy their primary aim is to prevent postnatal depression rather than to successfully treat depression before the end of pregnancy.

Some of the consequences attributed to postnatal depression could therefore be due to prenatal depression. Identification and treatment of depression at this time has therefore become a health service priority and has been recommended in National treatment guidelines in the UK (NICE).



Heron O'Connor et al 2004 found that 50% of women with high depression scores at 2 months postpartum had high depression scores at 32 weeks prenatally. We're missing an opportunity to address mental health issues women earlier and reduce adverse effects for mother and baby. Anxiety and depression during pregnancy are correlated with adverse birth outcomes (Dayan et al., 2002; Borders et al., 2007).

Challenging the Birth Bullies is another CBT Technique our Instructors use to help our clients (and themselves) to challenge unhelpful habits of thought about birth, breastfeeding and parenting. Birth professionals can help Moms reduce their interactions with these birth bullies by teaching simple 'enquiry' based techniques.



Sports Psychology Module

When was the last time you discussed MMA (Mixed Martial Arts) or the NBA and birth preparation in your CBE class or which techniques are used by Olympic athletes to prepare for an event? GentleBirth brings together the teachings of experts in sports psychology and presents it in an easy to understand format so Dads leave your work shop in no doubt of the importance of their role in helping their partner prepare (and using the techniques in their own preparation) for the big day. Emotion management, stress management and motivation skills are just as important for the birth partner for the most positive birth possible.



"I cannot wait for labour. I'm not stupid, I know it can go in different directions to what I have visioned. But the one thing that absolutely will not go in the wrong direction is my mindset. And to me, that makes me a winner."

- Leanne Keane - GentleBirth Mom -

Hypnosis for Birth

Part of our labor toolkit is hypnosis for birth. You'll learn simple techniques based in medical hypnosis to help your families use these tools for the best birth possible. Your clients will continue their preparation with the GentleBirth App. We'll demystify hypnosis in our Instructor training and show you how easy hypnosis is for moms with a flexible mindset.



How our Instructors Put GentleBirth to Use in their Day to Day Lives

Sinead – GB Mom and Instructor

I had a car accident with the two kids a month ago, I got to really experience fight or flight, I burst open the door that was smashed in & got Annabelle out. All of us were fine thankfully, I sat with the 2 kiddies at side of road, shaking & I thought, ok panic over, babies are fine, I'm fine. Started being grateful for my kids health & mine & did the "Re- Laaaaax" breathing. It made a world of difference. It also gave me the kick up ass to start appreciating what I have & to get back to yoga & listening to mindfulness CDs & looking after myself mentally & physically so I can be the mom & wife & person that I want to be. Always remembering to think better feeling thoughts & living life in the now!! CDs- affirmation, hypnosis, WIN & breathing techniques all stemming from GentleBirth.

Niamh – GB Mom and GB Instructor

Yes GB really does work wonders. When I had my accident and broke my ankle, GentleBirth helped me stay calm and focused as I called an ambulance, got transferred off the grass by chair and was offered oxygen but did not need it, ambulance crew thought I was in a deep state of shock I was so calm, got to Naas general hospital had to stay overnight on the corridor, big 34 week bump, immobile, in temporary cast again escaped into GentleBirth. Transferred to Tallaght hospital, hadn't been in there since my mom died there 9yrs ago this Sept so was very emotional being there again GentleBirth to help me through this. Then surgery by spinal, pate and screws if can do anything for a min was my mantra and it got me through all of it, then 8 weeks in a wheelchair before Leigh arrived lots of time on my hands and did GentleBirth tracks so pretty much magic stuff to help you cope with pretty much anything

Mary Tighe – GB Mom and Instructor

I originally took a hypnobirthing workshop with Tracy back in 2005 when pregnant on my first and absolutely terrified. I have a link to how I found my first pregnancy on my blog here: <http://birthingmamas.ie/blog/8/9/2013/my-first-pregnancy> and my birth story is there also: <http://birthingmamas.ie/.../sadbhs-birth-story-march-2006> I was very impressed with how the hypnobirthing helped, but I did have some feedback to offer Tracy at the time about the course. I didn't like how prescriptive the breathing instructions were and I felt the course could have prepared us more for the interventions offered to us in the hospital. I had originally intended to train in hypnobirthing but then Tracy let me know she was in the process of developing her own programme and it would have a lot more information about interventions in the hospital setting and how to navigate your way around them for the couples. She also told me it would be a weekend workshop format which also appealed to me as doing the course over a series of 4 weeks didn't really suit my life at the time (with a young baby who very much only wanted Mammy in the evenings!). I also had gotten to know Tracy very well by this stage and was very impressed with how thorough she was and how hard she worked - she was very dynamic and I felt any course she offered would have covered everything. I wasn't wrong and I am so glad I decided to train as a GentleBirth Instructor. The course is very cleverly aimed at the Dads as much as it is the Mams, and I love over the course of a weekend watching the Dads get enthusiastic about the upcoming birth (at my workshop last weekend the best comment was from a Dad who at the start told me he had been dragged along and just before he left told me he felt ready to deliver the baby!!!). I have been teaching the workshop now for over 5 years and I love how Tracy is always researching, always offering us the latest evidence based articles, always thinking of ways to improve the workshop. It really is a brilliant weekend for couples and they are always so impressed by the end of it - and best of all they enjoy it. On my second baby I used GentleBirth (of course!!!). I loved how much of a role it gave to David and the simple acronyms he had to remember if anything was offered to us. He was a fantastic support and he said after he felt he had more tools the second time round to help me (because of doing the GentleBirth - yes I made him do the workshop again as well!!!) I hope this helps anyone considering training to do the course.

Read GentleBirth Instructor Sylda's experiences with GentleBirth on her award winning blog – Mind the Baby <http://mindthebaby.ie/2012/05/06/my-birth-story/>

Mens Agitat Molem Minds Move Mountains

The Evolution of GentleBirth

Mens Agitat Molem

I came across this quote recently – 'Mens Agitat Molem'. It's most commonly known as 'mind over matter' but I had a real 'aha' moment when I read the original translation which is 'minds move mountains'. It immediately took me back to the moments after my 10lb 7oz baby boy was born and the feeling of "WOW I DID THAT!!" - I felt like I could move mountains – lots of them in fact!! I had the most incredible mind body experience imaginable on that day (not pain free I might add – back labor can be intense).

Cooper's homebirth ended up being longer than my induction with my oldest boy Jack who was born in California. Cooper recently had a birthday and he's changed quite a bit since that mind blowing day – we both have. As Cooper has grown taller and cuter I've been 'growing' some new additions to the GentleBirth programme. Change is good.

The foundation of the programme remains the same but I felt that something was missing. Our focus in GentleBirth has always been on positive birth as defined by the parents themselves - medicated or unmedicated. The outcomes of GentleBirth Moms have always been impressive – lower cesarean rates,

low epidural rates....high breastfeeding rates.... so part of me struggled with making these changes... why change anything? Did I really want to do a 'Coca Cola' and change the traditional recipe when it was working so well? But I couldn't shake this feeling that as a midwife and a mom the focus was too much on the birth...and not what comes after. Ask any new mom and she'll tell you the real labor starts when childbirth ends. We do have our much raved about postpartum Mp3s to help parents adjust to those first few weeks but I wanted to give moms more tools. Tools that didn't require an Mp3 player, tools and exercises that were based in international evidence to support a new moms mental and emotional health. There was a depth to the programme that was missing...becoming a mom is so much more than labor..... this rollercoaster rite of passage begins from that BFP – not the first contraction. This was the missing link.

I'm a big fan of hypnosis and use it regularly for myself for minor aches to gallbladder attacks. For a long time I thought it was all about swinging watches and grown adults performing questionable routines on stage. I'd heard about HypnoBirthing (Mongan Method) when I was living in Singapore and had an opportunity to train with Marie (Mickey) Mongan herself – what an incredible pioneer. This was where my interest in the mind/body connection became really focused. I taught HypnoBirthing for a year and as I've mentioned in other blog posts. I started developing GentleBirth for Moms in Ireland to include relevant prenatal education for Moms navigating the Irish system. As a doula at the time I added in physical comfort strategies so moms would have more than one tool in their labor toolkit on the day and sports psychology. (We also explore 'head hacking' 'hormone hacking' and 'environment hacking' to optimize those amazing hormones in birth). As GentleBirth grew in popularity I often received enquiries from moms asking if our programme was the same as hypnobabies or hypnobirthing....so I'd end up spending a lot of time explaining how some aspects are indeed similar but there are a number of differences too (both offer something different for everyone). GentleBirth has never promised pain free births.....in fact our Instructors spend 1/3 of the workshop on physical comfort strategies to help manage painful sensations but I felt that GentleBirth was being pigeonholed into just another 'hypnosis for birth class'.

Mindful Mama

I was introduced to mindfulness and meditation when we lived in California in 2001. I wasn't a great student and didn't practice as much as I should but I enjoyed it when I made a point to practice. The world just seems to slow down when I'm actively more mindful. It's nice to have your mind and body in the one place for a few minutes everyday instead of a racing mind that's in the future or the past. A few years later we moved to Singapore and then back to Ireland. Every so often I'd make a special effort to mindfully eat...or focus on only what I was doing at that time but my practice waned as I got caught up in the "business" of developing and launching GentleBirth. The irony isn't lost on me remember

that saying 'the shoemakers son has no shoes'? I got so busy with GentleBirth...being present...being mindful of your thoughts...etc etc... that my own practice fell by the wayside. Thankfully I rediscovered the joy of mindfulness in my midwifery training. Learning how to be present on purpose made a huge difference during some very emotionally and physically intense days and I found myself pregnant with my youngest son Cooper half way through. Getting back to mindfulness was like coming home.....it was a place of rest...a place to re-energize a few minutes at a time. No incense or candles required. In L&D just focusing on my breathing for a few moments as the mom in labor focused on hers grounded us both and we could see more clearly what we needed to do together.

Retraining the Brain and Building the Muscle of the Mind

What your brain is doing in labor is just as important as what your body and baby are doing.

My fascination with how the brain works led me to the science of neuroplasticity (the brain's capacity to rewire itself and grow new connections) particularly self-directed changes in the brain (DIY brain remodeling). It's estimated that there are approximately 100 trillion neural connections in the brain... more than there are stars in the Milky Way. As a midwife my training was very much focused on the hormones...and the incredible physiological changes to every system of mom's body. But there were no lectures about the brain – the incredible "engine" that drives those changes....all the focus was on the uterus. The brain is plastic...it changes all the time – in positive or negative ways depending on how we use it...the pregnant brain is even more plastic. There is a saying that mothers are made and not born and when we look at how your brain undergoes incredible structural changes in pregnancy and the post partum period that are triggered by hormones, your stress levels and by your baby's response to you. Just like your newly born baby – there is an unfolding of your 'new' brain which has been literally reconstructed. I started having light bulb moment after light bulb moment....and the same question kept coming up.....is there a way that we can help moms optimize these incredible brain changes so mom can take advantage of this short window of opportunity to improve not just her experience of pregnancy and birth but also her emotional and mental health after baby arrives?

The answer is a resounding yes!! We can help moms do this with Mindfulness, Meditation, CBT and hypnosis – in just a few weeks.

Studies are now showing that learning mindfulness and simple meditation skills improves blood pressure, reduces stress, increases positive brain chemistry and improves memory. In pregnant moms mindfulness is associated with reduced fear, anxiety, depression, increased confidence focus and concentration as well as more positive emotions (and less pain in labor).

The ABCs of CBT

CBT – Cognitive behavior therapy is now the leading treatment for anxiety and depression. In a nutshell it teaches you how to handle your emotions and challenge habitual thoughts that cause unnecessary stress ("All the other Moms seem to be coping so well...I'm just not cut out for this"). With CBT Moms learn how to think differently about themselves and others and in doing so build emotional resilience so they don't sweat the small stuff as much and bounce back from challenges quickly (always helpful for first time moms). Moms learn to recognize habits of thought and challenge them. Recent studies show that CBT is more effective than medication in most cases. Even an online course so in many cases there's no need to go to "therapy"!

The Journey Continues

The more I learned the more I realized that these were skills not just for parents....but for midwives...doulas and all birth workers too. We can become more mindful in our midwifery and doula practice. As midwives, doulas and childbirth educators we can help families manage their reactions to the negative stresses of becoming new parents (it can be stressful for many) when we can't avoid them. It's not just about changing our thoughts but changing our relationship to them. There is so much focus on teaching parents about feeding, sleeping, baby bathing...all very important, but we can also teach moms and dads how to cope with the stresses of pregnancy and parenting in a more effective way that supports their mental wellbeing. We can teach them more than breathing techniques. Even as little as 8 minutes of these techniques a day grows new neural structure in the brain...it's like a muscle – use it or lose it (think of it as 10 minute abs...but for your brain). Shouldn't brain training for birth be as important as perineal massage or good nutrition? When parents learn to challenge unhelpful thoughts about birth or parenting they are intentionally changing the wiring of the brain. When moms start to do this it takes away the emotional 'sting' of a stressful situation so they don't react to the stress – they learn to react more positively in a shorter amount of time. Moms can take a 'helicopter' view of a situation which gives her perspective (something we don't have access to when we're stressed which is why we tend not to make the best decisions at that time). Parents are not only reducing stress for themselves but reducing the impact of stress on their unborn baby as well as promoting healthy attachment and attunement when their baby arrives by reducing prenatal and postnatal depression. As moms and birth partners practice these techniques the part of their brain that is responsible for planning... making decisions...ration and logic grows (it's like we've turned up the volume)....and the emotional over reactive (and often irrational) part of the brain is turned down.

The mind is a muscle and the brain can be trained just like any other muscle of the body

- ☑ What better gift to give expectant parents than the tools for a positive pregnancy and birth and the emotional skills to become gentle parents....who will raise gentle childrento become part of a more gentle society.....the possibilities are limitless. This is brain training for birth and beyond – this is GentleBirth.

Join me in becoming a part of the most exciting and innovative birth preparation programme available in the world today and let's move mountains together - as GentleBirth Instructors.



Certification Process

Once enrolled learners have 6 months access to the GentleBirth Institute.

Learners will complete a 6 week Mindfulness for Birth Professionals training available through the GentleBirth Institute (included in registration training fees). This may be taken concurrently with the GentleBirth Childbirth Educator program. The soonest a learner can complete the full training is 6 weeks. The required reading will facilitate a deeper learning of the curriculum content.

The GentleBirth Institute the pass rate for each module quiz is 80% (each learner has 3 attempts).

On completion of the online training learners will complete a final comprehensive exam (80% pass rate). Learners can then automatically download the GentleBirth Teaching guide and presentation materials to begin teaching immediately. Register today at <http://www.GentleBirth.App>

Required Reading

Brain Training:

Afremow	The Champion's Mind
Edelman	Change Your Thinking with CBT
Kabat-Zinn	Mindfulness for Beginners
Vieten	Mindful Motherhood

Birth :

Buckley	Hormonal Physiology of Childbearing (available free online).
Donegan	GentleBirth - Your Positive Birth Begins Here (free in App).

Breastfeeding:

La Leche League	The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding or Breastfeeding Made Simple: Seven Natural Laws for Nursing Mothers
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Congratulations for looking outside of the current CBE 'box' and exploring ways to make positive changes in your community with GentleBirth. Your passion for positive birth is already making an incredible difference in the lives of the families you work with (or soon will be working with). You are changing the world one birth at a time. Now is the time to expand your work to have a positive impact on even more families with the most advanced CBE program available today.

The future of childbirth education is already here - will you be a part of it?

Register today at <http://www.GentleBirth.App>

Tracy Donegan RM

GentleBirth Founder