

"I Had a Baby": Three Steps in Healing from Difficult Births



"I Had a Baby"

"I felt seen, heard and validated, and that there is a path I can walk down. I feel I have softened, and the work has helped me feel hopeful."

-- Parent in North Carolina, US who has benefited from the Integrated Prenatal and Perinatal Dynamics approach



About Kate White (she/her)

Kate began her work as an international health professional working as a maternal and child health specialist in many countries around the world. She came back to the US in 1993 and selected bodywork as the way she could work more directly with families during the reproductive years. She became a licensed massage therapist in 1995. In 1999, she had a client remember her birth on her table, and that began her quest to understand the baby's experience. Now, many years later she has studied with many master trainers in the fields of prenatal and perinatal psychology, energy work, and somatic trauma resolution and she has developed training programs of her own to support families starting from preconception. Her complete list of trainings includes Biodynamic Craniosacral Therapy, Polarity Therapy, Polarity Life Coaching, Somatic Experiencing®, Blueprint Resonance, Prenatal, Birth and Attachment Therapy, Advanced Family Training, and more. For a complete lists of her trainings, go to belvederarts.com. or [click here](#). She lives in Charlottesville, VA, USA.

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Welcome! We are so glad that you are here.

This ebook came about because of the many women that I have helped over the years, and those who continue to come and ask for help to heal their difficult birth experiences. I started helping families with new babies in 1995, as soon as I received my massage therapy license. Before becoming a therapist, I worked as an International Health Professional in the field of Maternal and Child Health, a passion that began with visits to Africa as a young adult. My service to families in reproductive health spanned over decades of study and practice. In 2003, I met and began work with midwife Lois Trezise, CNM, in Vermont where I built a healing arts center dedicated to the perinatal healing arts. Together, we developed a method of supporting families before birth, and then catching them afterwards if their births were challenging. Our methods grew into our training program for professionals, [Integrated Prenatal and Perinatal Dynamics](#). This program combines the midwifery model of care, prenatal and perinatal somatics, and the baby's experience of birth commonly known as birth psychology. Our holistic approach combines trauma sensitive approaches with practitioner skills to create the best possible outcomes for families having babies.

For women and couples coming to heal their birth experiences, I commonly recommend three first steps:

- Step One: Map out your strengths and layers of support.
- Step Two: Write down your birth experiences including everything, especially the painful and difficult parts.
- Step Three: The Holding Healing Story and messages of repair.

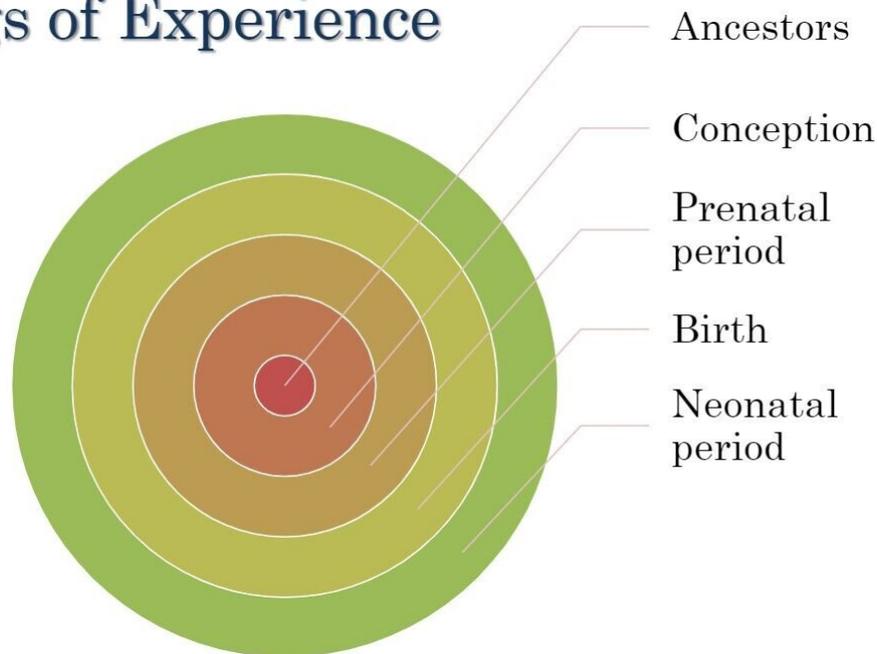
These recommendations were originally crafted as blog posts which I sent as exercises to each person who came to see me for help with challenges experienced during birth. This ebook now supports people with an outline for first steps for healing trauma from difficult births.

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Step One: Map Out Your Strengths and Layers of Support

Everyone has experiences from the pre and perinatal time. For mothers/birthing parents you can start with mapping out your layers of support starting preconception. What were your experiences starting before you conceived that were supportive of you, your relationships, your pregnancy and trajectory as a mother/parent? There is often that one nurse who was awesome and kind, or an anesthesiologist who knew just what to say, or a family member who came to your aid. Identify these strengths and resources in your experience. That is the first step. Try this.

Rings of Experience



Take out a piece of paper.

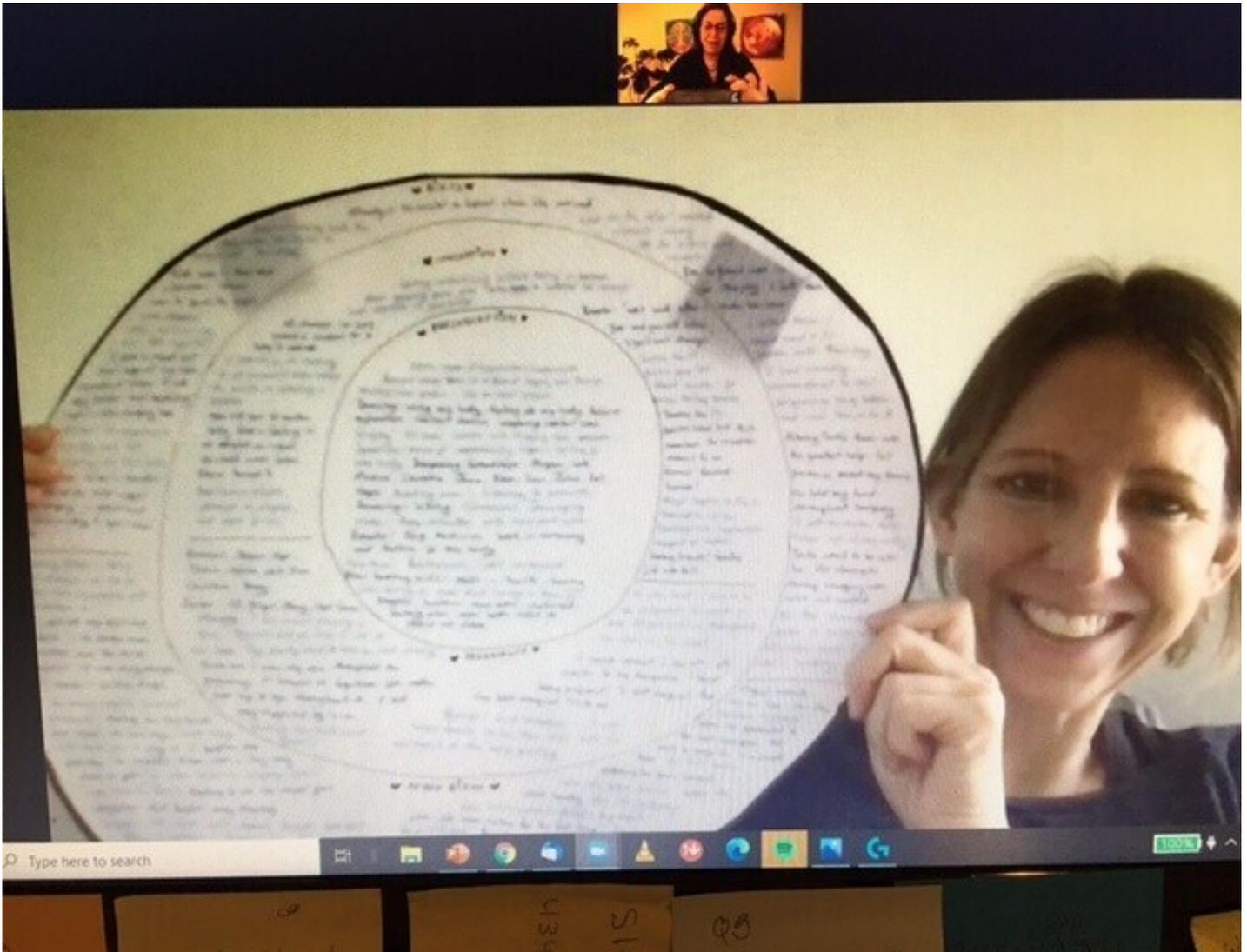
Draw the concentric rings like the example above and begin to fill in those layers of experience. Start with resources - the things that have helped you. What does this look like? Here are the rings of experience and what to consider:

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1. Preconception: What was your life like before you conceived? What helps you feel strong, empowered, loved, calm, peaceful? Make a list.
2. Conception: What was conception like for you? What were the wonderful moments? Tell yourself the story. Make a list of the conditions that helped you around the conception of your baby.
3. Pregnancy: What has helped you during your pregnancy? What are the good moments? Who are those who have been there for you? What happens in your body when remember these resources during pregnancy?
4. Birth: What are your resources during birth? Was there a nurse or a practitioner who was really there for you? A space that worked for you? Just focus on what worked, and notice your body. Especially when things don't go as planned, make sure you list what helped. Notice your body.
5. After birth: What helped you after the baby was born? What are the most magical moments? Just notice what happens in your body when you orient just to what worked, not what is not working.

This is the first step.

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Parents who have applied our approach did this exercise on large pieces of paper. In this picture (published with permission), the concentric rings represent the layers of experience this person had for the birth of her daughter. The writings are the many good experiences she had before her pregnancy, her prenatal life, during and after the birth.

Step Two: Write It Down

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After you have mapped out your resources in the layers of experiences, the next step is to write down your birth story, especially the negative parts. We have found that women will carry their birth stories their whole lives, some women never talking about the most painful parts. It is a huge weight.

Birth stories seem to be such a touchstone for parents. Women who had traumatic births often feel very badly when glowing birth stories are told. There are so many layers of difficulty for so many women. We can start preconception. For this part of your healing journey, you may want to make note of your life in how you approach pregnancy and parenting.

- ▶ What kind of parent do you want to be?

- ▶ If you had miscarriages, do you feel complete about them? Have you grieved the loss of your babies, and/or do you feel at peace? I have taught classes on loss, and many people feel greatly relieved to talk about their losses, including abortions and still births.

- ▶ How was conception? If you had infertility challenges, this phase may carry a lot of trauma with it. There may be fertility medicine that you had to take, or lots of hopes and dreams dashed by processes that didn't work. Your body stops feeling like your own.

- ▶ Was your conception planned or was it a surprise?

- ▶ What happened when you found out you were pregnant?

- ▶ How was pregnancy? Were you horribly ill? Or did you feel your best? How was the weight gain and the quality of your care? Did you get gestational diabetes or high blood pressure, two common conditions in pregnancy? Were there other conditions?

There are a lot of issues that can come up for pregnant women, including depression, anxiety, pain, discomfort and lots of expectations of others.

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Then there is the birth. Please write down everything.

- ▶ How did it start?
- ▶ How did you feel?
- ▶ Did you get good support?
- ▶ What happened? The research shows that the expressive writing needs to include the hard parts.
- ▶ What happened after delivery?
- ▶ Was the baby given to you? Were they taken away? Did they breathe well right away? Did they cry? How was feeding afterwards? I find that many women and babies need a lot of support here.
- ▶ How was lactation? If you chose breastfeeding, did you get good support? Some families report trauma from lactation consultants and pediatricians.
- ▶ How was your transition to home? Many times, couples tell me this is the first time they felt safe after difficult births outside the home. Other times, couples tell me these moments at home with their newborn terrified them. They didn't know what to do or how to manage.

Write down everything. The study completed by Di Blasio and colleagues showed that this kind of expressive writing helped decrease post traumatic stress and post partum depression.

Birth Story and Recovery

Childbirth and Narratives: How Do Mothers Deal with Their Child's Birth? By Paola Di Blasio and Chiara Ionio (Italy)

- Expression of negative emotion could reduce the occurrence of stress symptoms
- Study: Control group wrote out birth story (n=64)
- Decreased PTSD symptoms

When you are complete, let's go back to the layers of experience and put the experiences in the layers. We can work somatically to help decrease the potency of the trauma experiences using your resources in your layers. I often use touch to help women feel themselves. Many people just can't feel their bodies, or they have lost trust in their bodies. I use deep, still touch, moving touch, light touch, a kind of pulsing touch I call Tidal Touch and then a kind of touch that works with the breath that I learned when working with near death experiences.

Working somatically can happen in-person or online. I work with women around the world now. We work with the felt sense, or sensations in your body. If you cannot feel your body, we start with what you are feeling. We go slowly, orienting to present time.

I often ask women: What haunts you from the birth?

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We need to spend time with the painful experiences, but first we start from the present, from times in your life that feel good. Trained practitioners know how to facilitate change. This kind of work is a somatic resolution approach, going back and forth from the present to the history. This work will integrate these painful experiences.

What does a session look like?

I welcome you and ask, what is your intention? What would you like for yourself? If we haven't gone over what happened, we work with the story a little. I get a full history, starting preconception and explain the layers, especially how the phrase "I had a baby" becomes so much more. I often pause in the story so we can slow the pace. Trauma will often speed up the tempo. Many times, families are just confused about what happened, and I can reflect back moments during the birth that were overwhelming. Couples and babies report that this is settling. Many people go away from our first session feeling much better.

"When thinking about how you helped us with the birth trauma, I think one of the best things you did with me, is stop and breathe with me and affirm how hard each aspect of my story must have been. To have someone reaffirm this difficulty with me, was just so life-changing. It made me feel seen and heard and valued, and honestly like I was not crazy and that what we went through really was traumatic. It helped me to walk out of denial and have the strength to do the repair work." --

— Kristy Nicolette in Charlottesville, VA

Examples of sessions published with permission:

[The Water Cooler Moment with D.D.](#)

[Integrating the Hurt Places: Her Baby in the NICU with DD](#)

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Subsequent sessions start with feeling something good, or something that helped first, and then we work with what is more painful or haunting. If the session is online, I use verbal inquiry and the felt sense in your body, and I guide you to feel into what is helpful and what needs to heal. We deepen and broaden into the experiences that happened and the present moment. This is a somatic trauma resolution approach.

If you are coming to see me in person, I like to use the table to work with people. Sessions are fully clothed. I work with several different kinds of touch to help stabilize and actualize your intention: deep, still touch; moving touch; light touch; touch that follow the biorhythm of your breath; cranial touch; little squeezes that I call Tidal Touch. This is an approach I call Somatic Wholeness. It helps a person feel whole, connected to themselves and more present in their lives.

Sensations in the Body

Warm, cool, solid, open,
spreading, opening,
gathering, coming together
alive, soft, full, gentle,
expanding, settling, relaxing,
spacious, grounded, light,
connected, awake, vibrant,
calm, soothing, nourishing,
fluid, flow, ease, losing,
lifting

- Questions:
 - What do you notice?
 - What is your experience?
 - What happens when you?
 - Where is it in your body?
 - What tells you that you are okay just now?
 - What do you notice in your body?
 - As you bring awareness to that, what do you see? feel? Hear?
 - How is it to feel, notice, hear that?
 - As you notice that, what happens next?

How many sessions will I need?

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We have noticed that birthing parents often need 3 - 5 sessions to recover enough to manage their difficult feelings from a traumatic birth. Many report feeling better right away. Other parents (fathers) and babies may need their own sessions.

Step Three: The Holding Healing Story, Messages of Repair

The next step, after you have felt your resources within your layers, and working with the difficult parts of your story, is to craft messages of repair for your baby.

Families need a way to make sense of what has happened. My experience has been that much of the time it is not possible to assign responsibility for the difficulties that happen during births. Therefore, I work with you to create the space for that kind of repair. When you come, I affirm the challenge and say messages that providers sometimes need to say: "I'm sorry." "That was not okay." "That was very challenging, and you are a hero." "Your birth was a triumph." Because it was. All births are triumphs and an amazing testimony of our human spirit and commitment to life.

Many birthing parents feel that they did something wrong, or that the difficulty was somehow their fault. What can arise are thoughts and feelings along the lines of "I'm bad . . . I did something wrong . . . I am not a good parent . . . I failed." It is my job to help restore the sense of self that was hurt by the confusion and pain from birth trauma. It is a search and restore mission, and I feel I am at my best when I am doing this with a family: parents and baby.

With Parents . . .

With parents, I create a gracious space where they can feel sensitively held. We unpack the story and work in the layers as I have described above. The pain goes away. The story can now be held and told differently.

With Parents and Babies . . .

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With families, I teach parents to create an "infant coherent narrative" with the baby. Babies show their story. I help parents see what their baby is saying, and then we craft messages of repair. I often call these messages Belly Messages: When you were in my belly . . . Similar to working with the layers of experience with parents, I work with the layers of experience with the baby.

Challenges for babies may start preconception with ancestral traumas, not feeling wanted at conception, prenatal challenges and mysteries, difficult births and being separated from their parent after birth. I recently received an email from a parent I am working with asking me these questions:

When you say see if she wants to tell you her story too, I am curious the way you see this manifest in babies. Are you looking primarily for body language and movement? Vocalization? How do I/you know what to assign meaning and significance to vs a response what is not significant?

I decided to respond with a little demonstration and discussion about what it looks like, and how the work I do helps you.

In the following video, I go over:

- ▶ Why it is important to sort out your layers of experience.
- ▶ The role of the autonomic nervous system.
- ▶ How restoring your nervous system and own intuitive knowing is an important part of the process.
- ▶ How a baby may show their story.
- ▶ The importance of slowing down.
- ▶ And more.

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There is more to say, but I hope this will get you started. I hope to have videos of parents and babies one day soon. The storytelling process is very tender and private, as you can imagine. But it also restores yourself to yourself, for mothers, babies, parents/fathers and sometimes siblings, too. We need to make repair with families who have been hurt by birth, and also, to help prevent birth trauma with good preparation and support. The professionals I am training will be able to do that.

I am able to coach parents to listen and be with babies so that they feel heard. Touch is a very important component of helping babies feel heard and understood. I also help families craft messages of repair and develop affirmations that are genuine and authentic.

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The next step, after you have felt your resources within your layers, and working with the difficult parts of your story, is to craft messages of repair for your baby. I often tell stories about families I have worked with to heal ruptures, traumas and difficulties before, during, and after birth. One story is how the Belly Messages, or the Messages of Repair, were created.

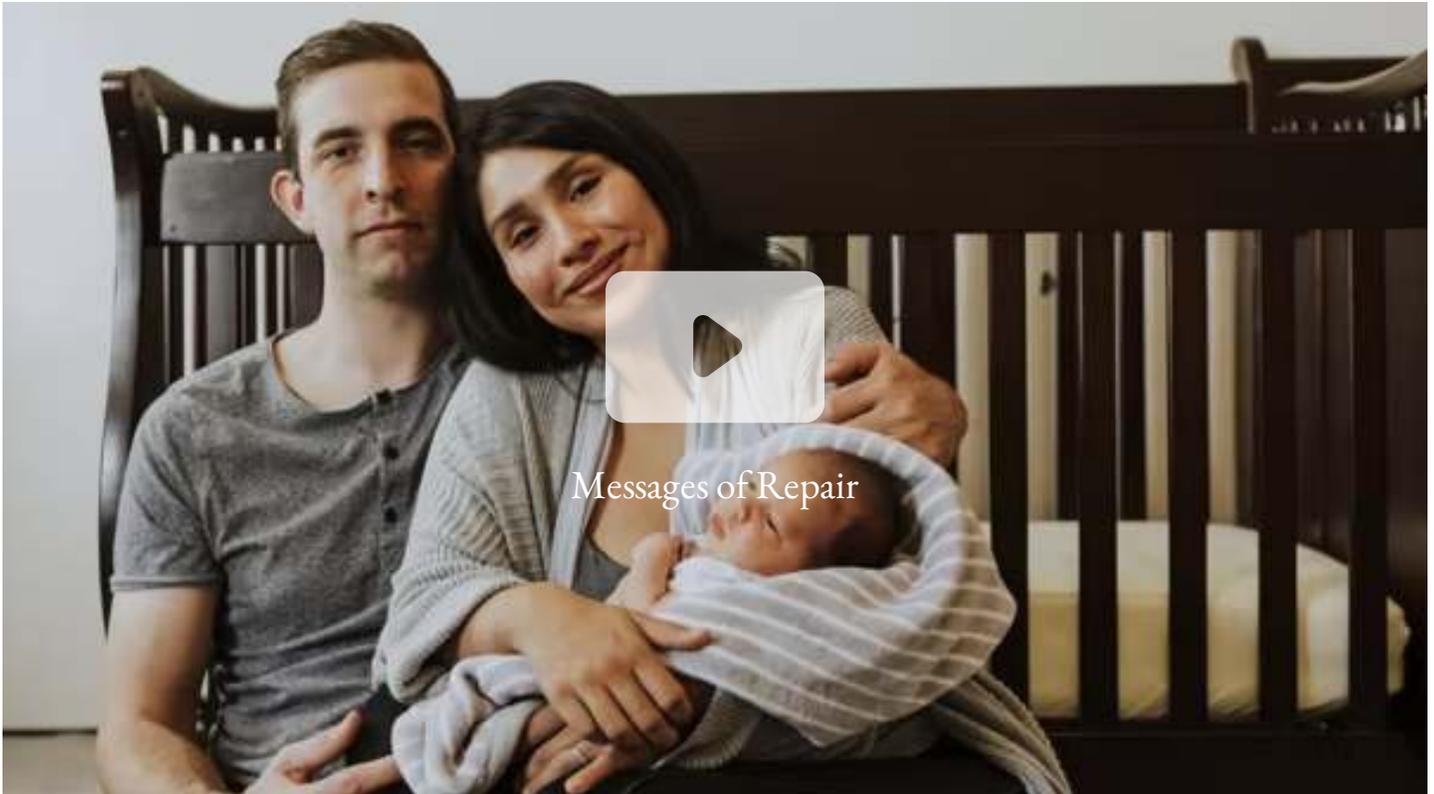
They came from a family I was caring for to heal the relational rupture between a mother and her son. He had a difficult birth and was put in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). There were other layers of difficulty, too. While I was working with this family, I met Martha Welch and her work, Family Nurture Science. She showed videos of mothers in the NICU holding their babies and explaining to them what happened, making repair by saying "I'm sorry, that must have been scary and painful." These mothers were authentic, let their feelings be seen by their babies. All this is important! And the research is compelling. I shared with Martha about the work I do with families, and she encouraged me to support parents to hold their babies while they told them the story of what happened. I will teach you how to craft these messages and to share them with your baby slowly, with connection and heartfelt explanation that the challenges faced had nothing to do with who they truly are.

The mother I was working with wrote messages to heal her relationship with her son that were very touching. She would hold her son (then two years old) and tell him the messages to clear up the layers of confusion and challenge that he may have felt. It helped heal their relationship.

I have made a video of possible messages that are similar to some that myself and my clients have made with our children. I also make messages of repair with families. I honor their work at becoming and expanding their families as heroic. Becoming a family is transformative. The work I and others trained by Ray Castellino offer helps those threshold moments feel like triumph and healing all at once.

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The following video shows examples of messages of repair. Overall, our message about healing birth is that so many things happen that are not anyone's fault, they just happen. They happen to you, not because of you or anything you did. We say this to babies, too. It had nothing to do with you. Honestly, we need to become more conscious of how we are supporting families, and we are getting there, step by step.



My heartfelt desire is for you and your family to feel whole. To walk out my door (literally and metaphorically) and never need to look back, to go on in a connected manner and thrive. The tools that I have give you and those that I employ therapeutically will help you do just that.

At the end of the Messages of Repair video, I say a series of affirmations that I learned from Jasmine Lee Cori, author of the book *The Emotionally Absent Mother*. I find her messages the best nurturing parenting messages I have found. They are:

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- ▶ I am glad you are here.
- ▶ I see you.
- ▶ You are special to me.
- ▶ I respect you.
- ▶ You can turn to me for help.
- ▶ Your needs are important to me.
- ▶ I'm here for you; I'll make time for you.
- ▶ I'll keep you safe.
- ▶ You can rest in me.
- ▶ I delight in you.

I recommend you create parenting affirmations of your own. You can find them if you search. Many people have created lists. I recommend you search and make lists of your own, or find your own words to convey the messages that you want your children to hear from you. You are the most important person to them. I often say to the birthing parent: You are the everything. The sun, the moon and the stars. You are the Earth, the air, and the water. And you really are for your baby. That is why making sure you feel good, and have enough support is key for you and for the health of your family.

Ray Castellino, Founder of Castellino Training, and master trainer for understanding the impacts of trauma during the prenatal and perinatal time developed eight Principles that help us hold families, and anyone who is coming to heal these early traumas. They are:

- ▶ Welcome - It is your conception right to feel wanted and welcome
- ▶ Mutual Support and Cooperation - We all are important and work together
- ▶ Pause - We slow the pace to self and co-regulate; its a biological imperative
- ▶ Choice - You can always say "no."
- ▶ Self-Care - Take time to care for ourselves, especially parents of small children
- ▶ Touch and Attention - We talk about the quality of the touch we offer, and our attention
- ▶ Brief and Frequent Eye Contact - Making eye contact helps create connection
- ▶ Confidentiality - We hold stories in confidence unless we have permission to tell

Perhaps there are Principles for your family that you can create to help you connect and thrive.

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One final note, sometimes the painful memories from your difficult births will re-emerge, on the birthdays of your child or if someone else's story is like yours. Know that if things come up for you, they come up to heal. Healing from trauma is often more cyclical or happens in a spiral, moving out and moving in. One thing I do know, is that with the right conditions and skills, the painful events will heal and remain in the past. You are always welcome to come back into my practice for a refresher. My door is always open.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to all my teachers. I would not be here if it were not for them:

William Emerson, Karlton Terry, Myrna Martin, Ray Castellino, John and Anna Chitty, Deb Dana, Mary Jackson, Tara Blasco, Jim Feil

Baby Bodywork teachers Alison Hazelbaker, Judy Terwilliger and Jonathan Evans

Instructors at the Somatic Experiencing Institute, especially Abi Blakeslee

And all the families with babies that I have treated for now nearly 30 years. They have been my biggest teachers.

I am in deep appreciation for my midwife partner, Lois Trezise, CNM for teaching me about midwifery and what actually happens at births.

And a most loving thank you to my husband, Bret Harris, who has been by my side this whole time, and who has held me in a gracious space so that I can offer what I have to so many.

Resources: Please enjoy my websites, blogs, vlogs, podcasts and more

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[Center for Prenatal and Perinatal Programs: ppncenter.com](http://ppncenter.com)

[Belvedere Integrated Healing Arts: belvederearts.com](http://belvederearts.com)

[A More Beautiful Life patreon channel](#)

[Repairing Prenatal and perinatal Trauma and Listening to Babies](#) podcast with Kimberly Ann Johnson

[Prenatal and Perinatal Healing Online: Online Programs](#)

[Find a Practitioner](#)

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[Castellino Training](#) Trainings, online education, practitioners trained by Ray

[Colorado School of Energy Studies](#): Programs, practitioners trained by John and Anna Chitty

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