

The Natural Alignment Plateau **The Bradley Method**

The natural alignment plateau is a normal period that occurs in over 50% of natural births. It is a normal part of first stage labor that some women experience and some women do not.

There are many ways to evaluate the progress of labor, which include: dilation, effacement, station, strength of contractions, time between contractions, duration of contraction, behavior changes, loss of modesty, emotional signs, etc. None of these methods of evaluation are completely reliable on their own, but if they are used together, the coach can get some idea of where they are in labor.

Medical personnel deal mostly with dilation, effacement, and station. They also deal mostly with medicated mothers. They are used to managing labors rather than allowing them to follow their natural course. They like to see a regular pattern of progress in regards to dilation. But it is not uncommon for a mother to reach a point where labor continues, but dilation of the cervix stops for a time.

During this time there are many things that may be happening that are necessary for the birth process to take place. Some of these things include:

1. Physical alignment of the baby's presenting part in relation to the mother's pelvis. This is something we cannot determine; the baby must find the best way through this narrow passage.
2. Softening of the cartilage in the pelvis and increasing flexibility of the ligaments and tendons as the mother's body prepares to accommodate the baby.
3. Time for breasts to form all the immunities necessary to protect the baby after birth. Secretion from the breasts prior to the onset of labor are very low in these immunities, yet they are full of them by the time the baby is born- this may require some extra time.
4. The baby may be in need of more contractions which massage the baby, stimulate its nervous and prepare it's lungs for breathing on the outside.
5. Psychological changes in the mother: Adjust to taking on responsibility of another life; anxiety at baby's first step toward independence; environment where they feel safe and secure.
6. Psychological changes in baby. (Evidence tends to support that the baby may be going through psychological and emotional changes during this time.)

During this time, it can be very easy for a mom to become discouraged by statements that she may hear. "You're still 5. You're only 5 cm. You're not getting anywhere. You've failed to progress." These mothers are working very hard in this time and they are progressing, they just aren't dilating. They may continue for many hours this way, or only for a short time, each according to her own needs.

It is very important to for the coach to keep the mother from getting discouraged at this point. Remind her that she is progressing- she's just not dilating. This is very important work that she is doing. It may be a good idea to put off vaginal exams for a while and explain to the medical team that as long as mom and baby are doing fine, you are willing to allow them the time they need.