

(introductory music)

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MARYN: Welcome to Indie Birth's Taking Birth Back series of podcasts. We began with prenatal care many, many weeks ago and have been moving our way through a pregnancy. Right now I'm about 19 weeks, and the subject for today is fear in pregnancy. Seems like something that we should discuss or at least have a podcast about, something that isn't really talked about. Maybe amongst close friends, but sometimes not even then as it's kind of taboo in many circles to talk about your fear especially specific fears in pregnancy for ironically fear of freaking anyone else out. So I think it's time to have a little talk about fear. I Googled fear in pregnancy. I was kind of curious what would come up, what kind of articles or—I don't know. Were there studies? Didn't find anything really helpful. Found a couple articles that listed the top ten fears of pregnant women and although some were definitely more realistic I think—such as again fear of something happening to the baby—a lot of the fears listed in my opinion were pretty superficial. So I suppose that's a judgment on what other people's fears could be, but I don't know who came up with this list. I don't think a pregnant woman necessarily did.

So the fear of an episiotomy for example or gaining too much weight—those aren't exactly the kinds of fears I'm talking about. I don't know that I would classify those things as fears, maybe concerns or maybe decisions to be made really because in the case of an episiotomy I don't know why that would be so feared really if you were making informed choices, but that's a whole other story.

So today we're talking about real fears, the kind of anxiety that doesn't go away and sometimes the more informed you are, the more fears that can crop up simply because you know more, and you know different things that can go on and so on and so forth. So I think the knowledge of complications definitely can add to fear for some of us, and that could be because we've studied a lot or we've seen a lot of births or it could just be that we know people or friends that have had certain things happen in their pregnancy. I do think that women taking full responsibility for their births, which is probably you if you're listening to this, may have more fears. I don't know. I don't have any scientific proof of that, maybe they're more forthright with the fact that fears are real, and maybe they're more forthright with the fact that we must deal with our fears. Sweeping them

under the rug does not serve us and does not lead us to an empowered birth experience.

So I think that's a relevant point. I think women taking full responsibility for themselves also feel the hugeness—if that's a word—of the unknown of pregnancy and birth. I remember ten plus years ago when I wasn't informed and wasn't taking responsibility, I didn't have many fears because frankly I had a false trust in someone else taking charge of my experience and trusting them that everything would just go perfectly. I mean why wouldn't it? When you take full responsibility, you realize that life is life, and there's an uncertainty to life and birth in a way just like there is to death, and that those two are two sides of the coin. So I think that reality at least for me is very clear in my own life and in the work that I do that when we take full responsibility we accept it all. And unfortunately that doesn't mean we can control it all. Nobody can control it. It's just an awareness of all that is possible.

So along those lines, I am certainly not immune to fear in my own pregnancy. In some ways, I feel like I can get worse fear-wise with each pregnancy until I find my center. I think it's all about finding the center. I look back and I reread old pregnancy diaries, and the truth is there's always something—maybe not major—something to sort of focus on or worry about or analyze so I don't love that, but I've noticed that's a pattern for me. And that's part of the reason of speaking I think out loud about this so that I too can find my center even sooner this time.

One drawback for me is the obvious I'm involved so heavily in birth and have been for years, and I get to hear all kinds of crazy, awful terrible things, freak, rare, tragic things at least occasionally. And when I'm pregnant I'm really just so open emotionally and spiritually so it's hard for me to not take that on. I think that's a lot of my problem. It's not that I believe or think these things would necessarily happen to me. It's just a general awareness that these things do happen, and when you know people that they happen to definitely makes it real. So my days of being naïve about pregnancy and birth being absolutely perfect and simple all the time without any worry or care in the world that's gone for me unfortunately. And hopefully maybe many of you have maintained more of that than I have, but again I think when you're taking responsibility these things do pass your mind. And we're going to talk more about why that's actually a good thing and why we shouldn't shun that or make it go away. We should work through it.

So again this fear matters. I think we all know why it matters. We want to be able to enjoy our pregnancies for one. That's maybe the simplest reason, and then the longer

range reason of course is to have a birth that we're able to feel empowered by instead of getting bogged down actually in labor or birth with fears that keep us from either fully participating in the labor or possibly having some kind of complication or slowness or whatever to the labor. So we want to get these things out now. We want these things to be faced before birth.

So there's not tons of real research. The stuff that I have to share with you is sort of anecdotal and from at least one book that I really enjoy, but I think it's safe to say that fear in pregnancy is really normal, and it's really common. And again it's just about us finding a place and time to express it and to get it out, even if that's in a journal or something we do just privately or if we do this with another person or a group even. It really is a normal, healthy thing to do and to feel.

So what I'd like to illuminate—I think this is the highlight really of this talk—is that fear may bring us to a point of increased strength and power. I think I've realized that and I've realized that fear has its purpose. It's not just to make you feel scared or to think about bad things. It really is I think to feel those things and come through the other side and realize how powerful and strong you are. So along those lines, I feel like fighting fear is probably not the best advice I would give somebody. And it's hard to tell somebody to feel it. You really can't make them. Something you can try on your own, but how about just feeling it? How about not trying to make it go away or to make it better? Just feeling it at least for the time being.

And that's okay. It may be beneficial, and ironically in the end when we are done feeling it and we realize there's actually nothing to fear, we may come out the other side feeling fearless. So to me that's a great motivation and a great goal to stick with the fear long enough to see what's going on and to figure out how I can get to the other side where I want to feel fearless. And I definitely have in birth. I'm happy to say that I have had at least several births where I went into birth feeling quite fearless in a healthy way I believe, and they were great births. So it's a goal worth shooting for I think.

So the fears may be about something specific. They may not be. For a lot of women, it's just the general unknown of the whole experience, and this obviously doesn't matter if it's your first birth or your tenth, there's still an unknown about this baby and this experience and this labor. We just don't know. And truthfully, I think the more labors you've had, the more you're aware of what an unknown it is. I think the first time or two you may think you have more control than you actually do. That's my opinion anyway. So one way we can deal with fear—and we'll talk about some others—is using dreams, but not getting freaked out by them. I think that's an important point, and I've certainly

gotten freaked out by my own dreams. A book that I'm going to read a little excerpt from is Aviva Jill Romm's *The Natural Pregnancy Book*. It's a great book. There's so many things in there that I love and agree with. Just a little bit that I don't but mostly that I do. I think it's a fabulous book, and she says something about women in their second trimester in particular really taking dreams super seriously. And I really took that to heart because I feel like I've been a little bit in that space of oh what does this dream mean? And what does that dream mean?

It's just sort of where we are in the experience. We know in our heads that dreams that can be prophetic, but more often than not at least in pregnancy because the dreaming is so vivid, that it's not necessarily a literal thing. It's something for us to process and we're dealing with our fears very obviously in dream formation.

So besides dreaming, connecting and talking with the baby is one way that I think we can alleviate fear. Connecting with the soul that to me in my beliefs is sort of timeless. Baby, yes, this soul will incarnate as a baby, but the soul itself could be old and very wise so I feel like that connection isn't just so I can connect with the baby. It's so I can connect with the soul and I receive guidance from this soul often as well. The soul who is wise and maybe been through more than I have to give me advice or just to sit there and listen and to be part of the experience.

So for me that's going out in nature usually, talking out loud, seeing what comes, seeing what I hear, what I see, what I get from this soul or what I get from the environment, finding a sense of peace. I think regardless of your spiritual beliefs whatever path you walk finding that place of peace, and there's no easy recipe for that, but many different ways to go about it. But it's all about having everything you need in the moment I think, about the life we hold in this moment in our bodies and not trying to go further than that, not worrying about the past, not worrying or projecting about the future, but simply being in the moment. There's a lot of security and safety and just absolute peace in getting to that place.

So I find peace in what I can do. Hopefully you know what I mean by that, but I can't control everything and neither can you about your pregnancy or your baby or how things will go or what will happen tomorrow. We can't control that. So what can I control? Well, I can control how I eat. I can control how I take care of myself. I can choose my thoughts as best I can. And I know these things matter so maybe they're just a way of making me feel better, and that could totally be. But it feels good to do what I can do which is my part just taking care of myself.

So I think a good question to ask yourself if you're feeling fear or if you're supporting women in pregnancy and things come up for them and they need somebody to listen are there concrete things that you can link the fear or anxiety to? Now that's really obvious. Sometimes there is, and that's simpler in a sense, and then sometimes there's not. Sometimes there's just this general sense of anxiety or fear and then that needs some investigation. But I think the practical things we can forget about.

So for example, I notice that I'm a lot more emotional and fears creep a lot more easily into my life when I'm really tired, and I have been really tired lately. Big life changes, moving, different house, that kind of thing. So if you've had any big life changes in your life look closely. Sometimes we just do it, and we don't realize how big they are, and that could be anything at all. It could be obviously a death in the family or of a pet or who knows what. It could seem like it's no big deal moving to a different house or having the kids start school, but maybe these really are bigger things in your life right now, and they're just kind of making you feel uneasy.

So triggers I think that's what I'm trying to say. What are the triggers for feeling anxiety and fear? Can you direct it to a specific event? I know for me like I said being pregnant I feel really open emotionally all the time. And so honestly for me looking on the internet or looking on Facebook can be a trigger when people talk about a hard birth experience or something negative that's happened to them in their pregnancy or post horrible ultrasound pictures with something wrong with the baby. This isn't about me. My brain knows that, but being pregnant, I can't help but feel some of it, and so I notice that something like that does trigger anxiety in me and maybe even later in the day I'll feel kind of icky or off or whatever, and I'll remember oh yeah I read all this sort of negative stuff this morning. And I just didn't shake it.

So I think that's pretty valid especially in the age of the internet now. We're not just meeting people on the street to talk to and hearing their stories. We have access to all kinds of crazy stuff should we want to go there and sometimes it's just even by accident. Sometimes you don't mean to, or people don't realize how sensitive pregnant women are, and they want to tell you a story about this or that, but there's just a part of the story that is emotionally hard to deal with when you're pregnant and can really trigger anxiety for some people.

So again what are the triggers? And you can ask women this. See if you can help them narrow it down. I think, yeah, we're just more open when we're pregnant. Everybody's issues could potentially become our own. At least that's how I am so I know that, and I need to protect myself better. So sometimes fear isn't about the

pregnancy, right? Sometimes it's about totally, seemingly unrelated stuff. So money is a big one, other family stuff, maybe extended family issues, immediate family issues, maybe there's issues with the partner, maybe there's issues in a business, who knows? Just pick something, pick some kind of life circumstance, and women in pregnancy will worry more about it. I think that's safe to say.

It's normal for these feelings to be increased, and I think that gives me solace as well. So when we're pregnant our sense of family and security and safety are all heightened, and I do think this goes back to just our blueprint as human beings. When we were out basically living in the wild, it was all about survival and protection. And with this baby inside of you, you are more aware. You are more alert. You are more sensitive so that you can protect yourself and this baby. So now in this day and age, of course, we don't have many physical threats to worry about hopefully on a daily basis, but we do have these other things that creep in and make us feel not safe and make our family feel not safe. And that's a problem. It creates fear.

So Aviva Jill Romm in this book I mentioned—*The Natural Pregnancy Book*, it's a great book—she narrows down some fears by trimester, and I thought that was pretty cool. On one hand, the trimester is just sort of this random way of grouping a pregnancy. Some would say it's pretty medical. I think for the sake of these podcasts it's good so that we know what we're talking about as far as where in the pregnancy, and certainly the week a trimester changes over to the next one doesn't mean that that fear would go away or whatever. She just kind of has the general grouping of fears, and I don't believe this is information unique to her. I've read it in some other books.

I think there's—I don't know—somewhere out there some consensus about the fears pregnant women feel based on how pregnant they are. So take it with a grain of salt. This may not be you at all, and it may not even be useful to you, but I thought it was interesting.

So she says in the first trimester the fear is mainly of losing the baby or of miscarriage. I think that's totally what we would expect, right, especially if you've been that way before. And the reason that there probably isn't too many more fears going on at least according to her pregnancy-wise is because there's still a pretty strong disbelief in the pregnancy in a general sense. There's not a lot of signs. Baby isn't moving yet so I can see that.

The second trimester pregnancy is real. That's when the baby starts to move. We can hear the heartbeat, and according to her, the fear is an obsessive worry that something

will happen to her partner or mate. So whoever that is in her life, whoever provides for her, takes care of her, she tends to get obsessive about it and may really need good communication with her partner as far as if he or she were to leave the house for too long then she might worry that he was in an accident or what would happen if the partner died. Then the pregnant woman would be on her own to birth this baby and then to care for the baby. So although sort of abstract, I think we can certainly find many women where these kind of fears apply, and it's just something to keep in your brain. Again it doesn't mean that this is everybody, but this is a possibility.

The second trimester as I mentioned before is also when women tend to be obsessive about dreams and what they mean. So worry is normal that there's something wrong with the baby. That's a really common dream. And she says too that the benefit is probably that if we can find our way through these feelings, we do come out the other side stronger. So I liked reading that. That's what I believe.

The third trimester—this is sort of funny but not—she says the woman is no longer really worried about her mate. So no longer worried about something happening to the partner, but women shift their focus of their fear often and they're afraid that they'll die in birth. So I don't know how common that one is honestly. It may be. It may not be. Or I think this one hits home more for me is fear of something happening to one of the older kids. And she explains that as just again a heightened sense of security around the family, feeling the vulnerability of life, which I do appreciate because honestly that's the reality as mothers, right, is that we don't control the wellbeing beyond a certain point of our children. So the fear of something happening to them in the third trimester is considered sort of typical and normal.

Worry and fear can just be something that happens, right? I mean maybe there are a million reasons like we said—circumstantial in someone's life. Some would say maybe it's hormonal, and I think that's possible. One empowering conclusion I feel like I've come to about fear in my pregnancy or in my life is I can choose not to, and although that's easier said than done as I said before, I can choose not to read the negative stories. I can choose not to take them on if I do read them. [clears throat] Excuse me. And I realize I don't have to worry. If every pregnancy I've already seen a pattern of me focusing on one thing or another to concern myself with, I can choose to not do that anymore. I can just choose to not be worried. It's not a prerequisite to being pregnant that I must engage in worry.

So it was really liberating to realize that. I realize I am entitled to a worry free and blissful pregnancy and so are you. We know that real life creeps in, and things could or

would happen, but that doesn't change that right now in this moment, we are entitled to not worry. We are entitled to have bliss in pregnancy and enjoy it. That no matter what should come, we can enjoy this bliss right now. So this was a huge release for me. I hope it helps somebody, or you can pass it on.

Yeah, I feel like it's sort of cultural in a sense too. If you can read about fears in every pregnancy book, on one hand it's really normal. But on the other hand, are we just expecting that we need to feel fear on some level because there is this cultural expectation of birth being scary? And I don't believe that. So it would really be funny for me to take on this notion that worry in pregnancy is just somehow part of it, right? So I think it's a balance. Yes, it can be normal, but on the other hand we don't have to accept this as part of pregnancy. We really can just enjoy where we are. We can be blissful. We can enjoy the baby that we have right now and not feel like we have to worry.

So some other tools, and you could look more into this because they can be potentially very involved are flower essences. I really enjoy the flower essences, and you can Google yourself. Like one of the Bach flower essences that might be right for you. Mimulus is a good one for fear because I have that one, and that one's for specific fear. And there's all kinds of different ones. I actually have a whole kit so I often make up a whole blend for myself or for other women if they're interested.

Essential oils can help for sure with anxiety and fear. And you know, for some women to be honest there is some pretty significant birth trauma. So whereas some women's fears might just seem like something their head dreams up, other women have had legitimate things happen to them in life or birth. And they are suffering trauma. So these are pretty gentle ways of dealing with fear and anxiety and trauma, but certainly some women may need more. Counseling and much more serious sort of solutions than what I'm offering today. I'd say this is for what I would consider general, normal anxiety and fear. Nothing debilitating. That's a whole other issue. This is sort of just the mild version.

So for these mild versions that we all know, that come and go, essential oils again is one. Homeopathics can be really good. Off the top of my head, aconites for fear. There are specific ones for dealing with abuse and trauma if that's an issue. Meditation of course. We can all find our way and space into being quiet which is really what it is, and regardless of spiritual beliefs we can find this quiet space to connect with ourselves and to connect with our babies and to just be.

So to end our session today, I'm going to read a visualization from Aviva Jill Romm's book. Again it's called *The Natural Pregnancy Book*. And I liked this visualization so I'm going to leave you with this for today. So it's all about releasing anxiety. Sorry, the microphone went away. I'm not sure if you got that—releasing anxiety.

“Imagine yourself in a place that is your idea of absolute beauty, security, comfort, and safety. It can be any setting you like—the beach, the mountains, or a cozy chair in a favorite room. This is a place you can return to in your mind whenever you wish to do so. Here in this space you can safely allow your worries to surface, knowing that they cannot harm you. Take each image, worry, fear, or anxiety and one at a time watch it grow smaller and smaller. Help it to dissolve before your eyes. Let it be washed away by rain or waves or let the wind whisk it far away. The images are dissolving until they no longer exist. These fears can no longer harm you. They are released from your heart. Feel yourself lighter, relieved of unnecessary burdens. And now imagine your most cherished ideal for yourself and your family. Whatever it is that you consider nourishing and important, conjure up this vision. Let this vision grow larger and larger. Let yourself be filled with the joy of this image. And you can take a few minutes here until you feel filled with the sensation. These positive feelings will grow and develop as you nourish them each day. They are a part of you now and always. When you are ready, you can return to your regular awareness filled with the joy of nourishing yourself and your baby. Slowly open your eyes, and take a few minutes to breathe deeply before you get up.”

I really like that, and I think if nothing else, it can become a habit, and I think ridding ourselves at least mostly of anxiety and fear in pregnancy can be a habit, that we need to practice it. We don't just wake up feeling less anxious one day. We have to practice it. The other great point she makes in this book which you can certainly go get or check out or whatever is spending time out of doors which I did mention. But she says there's really nothing greater for pregnancy health, for having confidence in your body and mind than aligning yourself with nature. So I second that, but I think we can all find our ways to peace in pregnancy. I think we all deserve that experience and our babies do as well, and I offer that to you today. So please, take time in finding your peace with your baby and yourself and your pregnancy and know that you are not alone. Thanks so much for listening. Have a great day.

(closing music)