

(introductory music)

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MARYN: Welcome to Indie Birth's *Taking Back Birth* series of podcasts here on iTunes. I'm Maryn, and we are making our way through a pregnancy beginning with a podcast many months ago. Today's topic is not necessarily related to pregnancy or my pregnancy but an interesting one that I'd thought I'd share with you. This week I prepared and shared this topic with a group of midwives and student midwives as a class sort of like a podcast almost. And, again, I thought I'd share it here because for many of us these are thoughts and ideas that ring true to us whether we're pregnant or planning a birth or not pregnant yet. Doesn't really matter. If you're listening to these podcasts, you probably are of the same line of thinking or at least curious.

So something else to keep you thinking today. The class I gave was called The Safety of Home Birth, and that's roughly the name, I guess, of this podcast today. But first of all, I want to just think about what that means. If someone said they were going to talk about the safety of home birth or if there was an article or a lecture, something to read or listen to, what would you expect that it said? I think it's kind of a bizarre phrase once I really got into thinking about it and sort of a bizarre thing to analyze for many reasons that I'll go into. And I think many people would feel like they had to defend home birth, I mean, if they're of that mentality, I suppose. Somebody that's had a home birth or planning one.

When we hear safety of home birth, we sort of get on the defensive, and we think about all the things that make it safe and why and how. And we might cite studies or research as part of our argument. And there was definitely a time when I did that for many years. My first home birth was nine years ago. And early on, I remember being more in that camp of somebody that totally supported home birth. But when the subject came up whether it was in person or online or was comments on a blog post, I was there. I was there to provide the research and the information as to why home birth was safe. And, again, a very defensive position.

So this question will definitely come up, I believe, if you are planning a home birth. Maybe not in your immediate circle, if your circle is very supportive. But you will get questions from the outside. And truly, it's not a bad thing to inquire about. Often people that don't know anything at all about home birth are just purely interested. If they've never, ever heard of anyone having their baby at home, then their minds naturally go to one of the first questions, which is, "Is it safe?"

So I think it is a valid question for some people depending where they are on their own journey. But we're going to approach it from a different point of view today. I'm actually not going to cite studies for you. I trust your intelligence and what's out there already really on the Internet. And if you search for safety of home birth, a variety of studies will come up, and that's kind of a whole other issue.

But today I want to take kind of a more radical view on what this means so that I can make a contribution, a positive one, to the world of birth that we're in. And you can to whether that's through your own birthing experience or whether you walk with other women. That you can kind of have a different spin on this topic as well. I don't want to add to the debate anymore. I'm tired of Dr. So-and-so here on this site and So-and-so there on another site. Constantly wanting to argue about how home birth is or is not safe. I'm over that argument personally. I am not interested. I am not—I am just not. Yeah. I'm just not interested. And I will not really answer that question from the defensive any longer.

I am interested, as you've probably guessed through these podcasts, in continuing to create what many people are calling the new paradigm. And, yes. The new paradigm is starting to occur in birth and in many areas, I believe, of our lives. So the old paradigm is something we're definitely going to refer to just for comparison's sake. And these would be these medically minded studies done by groups of doctors or medical organizations where safety is the only defining factor. So we're going to explore some of those things and see where it takes us.

I think partly today in this podcast I would like to have you think about some new criteria for women that may choose a home birth because I think that's often what the safety of home birth discussion comes down to. We're trying to determine who is qualified and, essentially, what the outcome will be to determine if home birth is good enough for somebody. But I say we need new criteria in this new paradigm. We need to critique the old for sure and come up with a new set of rules. So home birth is the best option for normal—excuse me—healthy women and babies. That is my opinion. And I don't need a study for that. I don't need a study to tell me that for myself in my life.

And I believe that when the new paradigm, the new set of beliefs are offered to women many will come to this truth with critical thinking, using their intuition and knowledge about how birth works. So it's not a convincing type thing whereas the safety of home birth, I feel like, is largely an argument that you need to convince someone of. That's the old paradigm. I'm right. You're wrong. Whereas the new paradigm is there are truths. There are inherent truths about the way our bodies work and the way natural, biological processes work that trump any kind of opinion really.

So why do we need to shift this perspective? Why do we need to stop engaging in the old and shift to this new way of thinking and talking about birth? Well, that list is long. Nothing is changing. Or at least not fast enough in this country, in the U.S. I shouldn't say nothing. I'm sure things are changing every day. But there is still a large amount of fear around birth, and that is evident by the amount of interventions that are done on normal, healthy women and babies. The rising C-section rate. The amount of women unhappy with their experiences.

The list is very long. We could focus on the negative of why is birth in such a bad place. But we can't continue to view the safety of home birth in this old paradigm anymore. It's different things to different people as we're going to explore. And it's built on a foundation of control and fear. The old paradigm that is. So our job in trying to refocus is that we can reconnect women with what they already know. And why does this matter? Why? Yes. It matters to me. It matters to you. It matters to the people that we're around. It matters to our generation. But what about the next generation? Our babies. And what about the generations to come after that?

I believe that the reach can be much farther than just you or I when we talk about shifting focus and getting back to our roots in birth. So I think the first thing that comes to mind when I'm thinking about the safety of homebirth, when someone brings that up to me, or I get that asked as a question or whatever, what does safety really mean? What does that mean? So just a quick Google search. A couple definitions of safe. "Freedom from harm or danger. The condition of being protected from danger, risk, or injury. A place that is free from harm or danger."

So you get the gist. But what I want to bring to your attention is that word in conjunction with birth. Right? Free from danger or risk. No. That's not true about birth. I respect birth. I trust birth. But it is a natural process like anything else. And my point is there is no way to make it completely safe. And that is nothing to do with anything. That has nothing to do with where the birth happens or who is there or anything like that. It is not possible to make birth 100 percent safe. So I think that's something interesting to point out. That maybe too defining for some because I've certainly said home birth is safe. Or I've used the word as well sort of more carelessly than this intense definition. That's truly the definition.

So you could say that the word safe really just is totally inappropriate for the subject of someone studying birth and outcomes or being interested in a home birth. That's the truth. But I think it tells you a little bit about where this viewpoint is coming from. Again, this old paradigm. The old paradigm is all about control and reducing any kind of risk at all. That's supposed to be what we want, right? And, of course, in a perfect world, sure. If we could have that, we'd probably take it. But it's not that way, and birth is not 100 percent free of risk anywhere for anybody.

So perhaps we should start using that word. Stop using that word rather. So in this old paradigm, we know what safe means. Or we have an idea. Who is determining the safety? Who? When you're looking at these studies or whatever, that's one example. A study might be determining safety. Who is appropriate for a home birth? Who should have one? Who shouldn't have one? Other things or people that determine safety for us are certifying agencies, right? Like the one study that said home births were safe with a certain type of midwife. Medical boards, practitioners, medical practitioners. Assessment and risk factors might determine who is safe, right? So often many states nowadays will have lists of women conditions or lack of that are safe or not for home birth. So in many states, VBACs are not considered safe for home birth or multiples or a woman with a breech baby.

So something to point out here is that the safety or the appropriateness of home birth for any woman is being determined in the old paradigm by someone outside of herself. Very much outside of herself. It's the other. It's truly the outside. There is no place in the old paradigm for the woman determining what she needs and what is best for her. Nor does her family. It's completely outside of herself. Studies and agencies and doctors in hospitals and things that mean nothing personally to her. I think that's fascinating to point that out. So that's the who.

What is determining safety in this old paradigm? What is? Well, a lot of them kind of go along with the who. So the credentials might be determining safety. Again, only this person is safe to have at your home birth. She must have an MD or a CNM or a CPM. There is only certain people that make birth safe. It's ridiculous. But this is the old paradigm. So experience. That could determine safety in this world. Certifications, skills, equipment. Again, things outside of the woman. Things on the outside that are somehow woven into what makes birth safe for her. It sounds really ridiculous once you look at it, at least to me.

So equipment. Transfer options and hospitals might be another thing that determines safety. I know here in Arizona the licensed midwives, I believe, can't provide home birth care to women that are too far from a hospital. So suddenly, birth isn't safe because of the distance her house is from a hospital. And politics of birth. We could spend all day talking about the politics of birth and how that is determining safety in many places whether they're midwives or nurse midwives or birth centers. We are seeing a pretty consistent and constant government control of birth that is making the safety really difficult for anybody to be able to achieve, if that makes sense.

So the box is getting smaller. That's what I'm trying to say. That the who and the what they are so accurately determining the safety. I'm being sarcastic here. That soon nobody will be safe. Nobody will be safe to birth at home which is probably exactly what the old paradigm would love to see, right? Because that's outside of their

understanding and comfort level. So what is the safety being compared against? What's the standard? And I think those of you that have listened to the podcasts and know about what we teach at Indie Birth will understand what I'm talking about more readily here. But birth is not birth is not birth, right? It's true.

So who knows in these studies or these organizations or licensing agencies, what are they looking at? What's their standard of birth? Because I'm betting that it's medical birth. And don't think for a second that medical birth can't happen at home. Don't think that hospital birth can't happen at home. It certainly does. Physiological birth really happens regardless of location although it is quite rare in the hospital. Physiological birth would be allowing the birth to proceed as naturally and as unhindered and as uninterfered as possible. And that is not the standard for home birth these days. I'm sorry.

And talk to a handful of women that have had home births and you will see that many of them are having hospital births at home. That they don't know anything. Their midwives don't know anything about physiological birth. And even if they did, the government control is often so strong on certain midwives that the clients they serve aren't really able to have physiological births. So, again, what's the standard here? The standard in the old paradigm is medical birth. That's just a fact. That's not even a judgment because physiological birth is not something that's understood or considered. So when you're looking at studies and they're already saying that a certain person needs to be there. Well, in many cases, you've lost any possibility of physiological birth.

And that's going to offend people, but that's the truth because the more government becomes involved in birth and the more we say that a credential is what determines safety the more we will be controlling the process. So think about that. Think about how birth differs in different settings with different people there. By women, by what she believes, by what she knows. And then tell me they're all the same, and we can compare them. We can't. Most definitely cannot.

So who is the safety good for? If we're going to talk about safety and be in this old paradigm for a minute, who is this good for? Well, it's good for anybody looking for perfection. Again, birth is not 100 percent perfection every time in every case because it's a natural process. And the word safe probably shouldn't be in there if we're really going to be nitpicky. But there are people looking for safe even if they knew what that meant. They would be looking for it. And I think this does include lots of women. This isn't an us against them thing, and it's just doctors looking to control birth. There are many women who, again, in a perfect world who wouldn't choose perfect birth. But I don't think that's real, and that's not a choice we get to make.

But there are women out there looking for no risk, right? No risk to having their babies. Whatever that means for them. So I think that's an interesting thing. That this old paradigm way of thinking doesn't appeal to everybody obviously on one it doesn't appeal to.

But it does appeal to many because it's this idea of control and perfection in an area of life just like death where we cannot have control and perfection. So a little bit about going back to what's the standard. What is the safety being compared against? What sort of birth are we thinking about here? Home birth does not mean physiological birth. And I think that's especially relevant for us as women and mothers. So never mind being birth people or doulas or whatever. Just as mothers. If you're going to have a baby soon or you're thinking about getting pregnant soon, then I think that's one of the most eye opening things you could realize. And I sure wish I had years and years ago.

And, again, that's that birth can happen at home, but it's not always physiological birth depending on who you have there and what your understanding is of that term because there is lots and lots of interfered with and medical type births that happen at home births. So it would depend on a lot of things. I think who is there certainly does matter. It's certainly going to influence the sort of birth that you would have at home because who is there often influences the interventions, the interference, which is different than an intervention. Interference and any technology that is used, right?

So if you don't have anybody there, you're not going to be interfered with other than by family maybe and technology. Probably not available to you. And not to say that's good or bad, but it's to say that who is there does affect sort of what comes out of the birth or what tools are used. Are there rules and regulations about midwifery and home birth in your state? Because if there are, it really pays to know what these rules and regulations are. And if you understand even the basics of the way birth works, physiological birth, you can take a quick look even at these rules and regulations and see how they do not support the physiological birth process.

And, again, that's not a judgment thing on this midwife or that midwife. But if they're operating under the rules and regulations, then that's their responsibility to follow them. So whether the birth is more managed should we say or physiological is going to depend on those things. And that's something to think about in either—well, in either paradigm. But for sure, in the old paradigm to consider that things can look lots of different ways and be called the same thing.

So I think—and this is obviously opinion as is much of this. All these things influence how any one of us would talk about the safety of home birth. So because I believe what I believe and I've just put that forth to you, I believe that one could prove whatever they really wanted to prove based on their foundational beliefs. So, obviously, my

foundational beliefs are, at this point, quite different than the old paradigm. So it's really easy for me to look at a study or this or that or hear about something in regards to the safety of home birth and prove whatever it is that I believe. And that's just a fact of the matter. So in the old paradigm when there are studies or something like that, I think it's safe to say that they're setting out to prove their foundational beliefs. And those are different.

And if those foundational beliefs that birth is medical and that anybody needs to prove anybody—anything to anybody else for them to feel secure such as the safety of home birth and if we really believe that certain people need to be there and this needs to happen and the hospital needs to be this far and it needs to be this kind of woman, that's a completely different set of beliefs. That's not the belief that birth is not medical. It's quite the opposite.

So my point is with the studies that are coming out here and there about the safety of home birth, sure. We can look at them. We can analyze them, but let's understand that they are going to prove what they were meant to prove. And that is to continue the thoughts and beliefs of the old paradigm. That is why they are there. So I won't even really look at those studies anymore. I like to keep up. I like to know what's going on. But, again, I'm done personally arguing with them. I don't believe that I need permission, and I don't believe that you need permission, if that's what you believe.

We don't need to be okayed. We don't need to get someone else's thoughts and criteria on what makes birth safe for us. We don't need anybody to tell us that because safety may not be a word we'd even use. And we can operate on a different set of beliefs. And the concern for the health of the mom and baby is very important. So for any super critiquers out there that think I don't care about safety, that's not true at all. I very much do. Both for myself and for anybody else. That's everybody's goal, obviously, is to have a mom and a baby that are happy and healthy before, during, and after birth. But, again, safety is a tricky word.

I do believe that credentials, certification, equipment—I don't believe that those things make birth more foolproof. And certainly, if we're going to get back to safe, nothing is going to make birth 100 percent safe. So that's all the old. That's probably just what you've already thought about. Or what you're used to because that's the world for better or for worse at the present moment. So let's talk more now about the positive side of all this. That we have this opportunity to flip things and quite participating in the discussion of beliefs we don't believe in. And we can make our own definition of safe or our new version, I guess you could say. I don't know that I want to mess with the word safe. But what are we concerned with here?

In the new paradigm, of course, we are concerned with a healthy mom and a healthy baby but so much more. It is so much more than that. And when you start to really expand your thinking about birth and everything that is birth from conception to breastfeeding and raising a child, you realize how the old paradigm is really quite limiting and quite close minded and to focus only on the outcome of birth is not what we're about at a deeper level. I don't believe. So to me, this new definition of positive outcome or—gosh. You could come up with your own term. Good birth. I don't know that I like that one.

Let's see. What else? I don't know. Positive experience. Includes a lot more than birth outcome. First of all, it includes the prenatal time. And you could tell I believe that by the amount of podcasts that are behind me already about the prenatal time. And I say on pretty much every podcast that the reason we're focusing on the prenatal time and each issue that would come up weekly is because it does matter. We don't just pop ourselves into the birth experience and shut our eyes and hope it goes well. We plan, and we work on things. And we investigate our issues, and there is lots and lots of time and effort and energy that goes into the prenatal time especially when you're not looking to someone else on the outside to tell you how you are or how you're doing or how great your birth is going to be or not be.

You're taking it all from the inside. You're listening to your own voice all of the time which is a big job. So the prenatal time is a huge thing that we must consider in the new paradigm. It's not just about the birth. It never will be. It's a healthy baby. Yes. It's a healthy mother. But it's an emotional experience. It's a spiritual experience for many. It's a rite of passage. Other feelings or things that could come out of a positive experience would be feeling strong and brave, amazing. Feeling trusting of my body. Feeling trusting of the process. Certainly being able to stay home and have a home birth is part of the positive part of all of this.

But maybe it's being alone at my birth. Maybe it's having an unassisted birth. Maybe it's having my best friend there. Maybe it's having a midwife there. Whatever it means. Including family. Receiving my own baby. Catching my own baby. Being the only one to touch my baby. Not pushing. I'm not pushing at all during the birth and just having the uterus eject the baby. That's another sort of goal that we are not considering in the old paradigm. Not being interfered with. Having community support. Having loved ones around. Having help. Having our children there. And this is an all inclusive experience.

So as well as prenatal time, we have the postpartum time. And that would also be really crucial to a positive experience because, again, it's not just about the birth. And if the old paradigm—if the mainstream would quit focusing on just the birth, we'd see lots of changes. We'd see lots of changes in mothering and breastfeeding and bonding and

attachment. But because it's so focused on the one event and no sort of prevention or nurturing or anything before or after, then we see that as—we see those results, I think, in some areas of life.

So these things will—all of these things, I think, make birth a more well rounded experience. At least of viewing it. Because that's the point. Just having it be safe or having one outcome be safe or positive is not the only point of the new paradigm. The point is all inclusive wonderfulness in this childbearing year. So, obviously, this is a different set of values and criteria. Obviously. And you can see how far reaching and intricate and detailed it is. And, in fact, this could probably make a much longer talk rather than just listing things. There would be many that you would add to the list, I'm sure, of your own way of viewing birth.

So let's not subscribe to the status quo anymore. Let's not argue with those that want to make birth a medical event. Don't enter into the argument anymore. Simply shift your focus and keep creating the paradigm that you believe in. That you want to live in because by entertaining the old and arguing and trying to prove home birth is safe or it's better or it's this or it's that we're taking energy away from the creation of the new which we very much need. We very much need that energy.

So the coolest thing is that in this new paradigm of birth who determines safety? We don't even have to use that word. Who determines if home birth is appropriate for her? Well, we already said it earlier. But the mother. No one from the outside has authority. That doesn't mean they don't have influence or can support her. But the mother is the sole person that determines what's right for her. And that is something to really think about. And I think each of us in our pregnancies can relate to that because there is so much coming from the outside, I find, on a daily basis. And I don't even seek it. So if you do, there is so much that comes. And to realize, to realize at a really deep level that the authority is all yours is just mind blowing, I think.

So no one, in my opinion, has the right to that authority. And so if you believe the same, then who you do have at your birth or who you do hire to support or care with you or for you, they can't be in a position of thinking they have any authority over the decisions that you make because you are the defining factor. What determines the outcome? Well, that's a huge topic because, again, we know that in this new paradigm things are much more complicated and that outcome is only one piece of the puzzle. So certainly, health is going to determine our outcome or partly, right? Our physical health but also our emotional, mental, spiritual health. How we feel is going to play a part.

And that's something that—one of the many things that in the old paradigm are sort of poo pooped or overlooked as being hippy or crazy or whatever. Our feelings do matter. They really do. The baby. That's something the old paradigm never considers, right?

It's all about the mom sort of as this machine. And there's not much talk about the baby other than getting the baby out safely. But what about the baby's own path, right? As its own being. Its own soul. What about the needs of the baby? So that could mean during pregnancy, during labor. There is another being involved in this process. So that leaves a lot up to whatever that means. Chance, unknown, discovery, mystery.

How much we trust our bodies. How supported we feel by resources and people. These are just a couple things that determine the outcome. So really can you see how when you look at a study of home birth midwives and how safe home birth how ridiculous it is. Even if the study comes out to say, home birth is safe or home birth is as safe as hospital birth, it's still ridiculous because there is no way that all of these things we know matter could be quantified, could be judged, could be counted because they're not recognized in that world. They're not recognized in the old paradigm.

So I believe that women need to learn about how birth works over time. So often if I were to get this question—and it often comes from partners actually, from the partners of the pregnant women. The safety of home birth question. My sort of typical response would be, "That's not something we can discuss in two minutes." I mean obviously. This podcast is way more than two minutes. So even if I'm not going to talk about why the safety of home birth is, to me, not a valid way of discussing this subject, I think it takes time. So for some women, for some couples, for some families, it takes the whole ten months for them to kind of go along this path and discover these things and discover all that goes into this new way of thinking and be comfortable with their decision of home birth at the end.

I don't think that people can assess themselves for home birth super well when they don't know anything about it or how it works or what the optimum conditions are and all the things that we've talked about today because it is not, in the new paradigm, hospital birth at home. It's a completely different animal. So if you don't understand that yet or you're working with someone that doesn't or whatever, you can't really rush them. It just happens in its own time, and they will or will not decide on home birth at the end. But it's not just a simple, "Oh, this study says it's safe, so we'll do it." I don't think it's like that. There needs to be a greater belief and a greater foundation built so people can make those decisions from a really confident place.

And, again, because it's not something someone told them, it's something that they've come to believe. So, again, differentiating between his home birth and physiological birth thing. And we need to teach women or we need to believe as women how physiological birth is superior. And that's a really bold statement I realize. It is superior. That's just a really hard thing to say in some circles because it's not judgment. It's simply saying that the way our bodies were meant to work is the way they were meant to work. It doesn't mean things don't happen occasionally or women don't consciously

make other decisions. But the process itself—the biological process—that's what I'm talking about here. Is superior. That's how we were made to do it. And no person created the birth process.

So we need to have confidence in that. And, again, if you're on the defensive, it's quite a different position to take. The defensive is always a different position to take. But if you're in this frame of mind, you're not defending anything. You're simply saying this is the way birth was meant to work. In most cases, it does. And when we're talking about those cases, it's not about it being safer than anything else or as safe as anything else. It simply is. It just is. The biological process of birth is.

So learn about physiological birth. Research it. Read. Talk to women in your community. Hire support. Hire a midwife. Hire a doula. Hire whoever you need to support you in this goal. Keep learning. And, of course, there is more, right? All these podcasts. Connecting with baby. Learning about nutrition and prevention. Clearing out your cobwebs. Dealing with your fears. Facing your fears. Getting in touch with your intuition. Consulting your intuition and your baby. These are all elements of this new paradigm where we don't give the responsibility anymore. We take it because it is ours to take. And responsibility is a really huge thing, so we want to be prepared. We want to do all of our work as best we can.

Don't look to the outside to be told what is good for you and what is not. That is my biggest gripe with the old paradigm. The old paradigm is still going, right? It's still going. And that's fine because there are people and women and men and—that operate under those beliefs. And until they don't, it will exist. So it's allowed to exist. But we can opt out by taking responsibility. Only we have the answers for our own questions. That is something I truly believe.

Big topic today. So that's my safety of home birth spiel to you today if you're in a position to receive that question. Again, I think it's about helping people see that they are making their own box when they ask it. And that's a big job in and of itself. But if people have the time and the interest and the true dedication to exploring this new paradigm, then it's a journey. There are lots of things to consider. There are lots of things we've talked about today that we could talk about in much more detail. Just the mother having true autonomy is so, so, so hugely different than what is being offered in the old paradigm. That that alone takes people—can take people a lot of time to wrap their minds around.

So reframe the question. If you get this question in an honest way, then our job as people and women that choose this path, we need to reframe it. We need to offer different criteria. We need to educate people. And remember, we will never win the battle in the old paradigm. And if there is a battle, I think there may not be a battle.

Two things can coexist. At least for a little while before one sort of wins out. And we don't have to see it as a battle. But if we are to enter into the old paradigm, we put ourselves, again, in the defensive. So that definitely feels more like a battle. And that is a battle we will never win because it's on that soil. It's on the soil of different foundations. And this belief that birth is medical and that we fear it. And we can't take our beliefs and superimpose them onto that paradigm. It just doesn't work.

So go forward and teach what you can. Learn what you can. Live by example. Build your communities. All of us. Make this available to the women whether they're your friends or neighbors or family. Have get togethers. Have potlucks especially when there are pregnant women and women that may soon become pregnant. And older women that have done their years pregnant and raising children. I mean these are valuable resources that we all have in our community, so that we don't feel like we're alone. We're not looking to some source outside of ourselves. But our communities are often our own. And we do thrive on their support and information and feedback to make our decisions. So we're not isolate. We're just not looking to things and organizations outside of ourselves to get these answers.

So it's up to us. I think that's the message of many of the things that we say here on Indie Birth. It's up to us to make this change. The world is heading where it's headed. And each of us in our own experience can make a difference whether we're pregnant or not. There are many different ways and roles that we can have to affect birth. So thanks for listening today. We are doing a free giveaway on Indie Birth, so go to our site and check that out. You don't have to be pregnant to register. Anybody can register, and anybody can win. We have some really cool prizes. Thanks so much and catch you soon.

(closing music)