# A doula's handbook: pregnancy after infertility

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# Table of Content


Introduction 3

**Tool: Using the breath** 4

Support for Earlier Intervention 6

***Meditation: Mindfulness Script*** 8

Support for Mental Well Being 11

**Tool: Breathing for Worry/Anxiety** 14

***Meditation: Basic Relaxation Script*** 16

Support for Holistic Care 20

***Meditation: Heart Womb Breathing Script*** 21

Meeting the need for increased birth support 24

***Meditation: Loving Kindness Script*** 27

Reminder: Take Care of Yourself 31

Fertility Specialist Certification 32

# Welcome to the bebo mia, Pregnancy After Infertility e-book.

In the blog post, we outlined **4 major areas** that birth doulas need to focus on when working with clients who have previously gone through fertility issues. These areas were:

Early Intervention
Increased Support for Mental Wellness
Provide and Recommend Holistic Care
Increased and Flexible Birth Support

With this ebook, we will be providing tools that you can use to meet each of these important needs. These tools include: **meditations, breath work and guided relaxations.** Share these tools with your clients and practice them yourself - they are an incredible resource both in your business and personal life!

Before we move into the 4 areas of focus, let us start with a basic breathing technique that clients can use as they sit down to listen to the guided meditation tools we have listed below:

# Using the breath

One of the most accessible ways to use the breath is to focus on **simple belly breathing**. This is an invitation for your clients (or yourself) to get settled.

Sit down or lie down in a comfortable position. If you are sitting, ensure that your **shoulders are back and down**, away from your ears. If you are lying down you may want to bend your knees so your lower back can relax. Wherever you are just **ensure you are comfortable.**

Place your hands on your belly, allow the tips of the middle fingers to touch right above the belly button. We are going to begin to **breathe in and out of the belly.** Breathing in and out of the nose if possible. If it is not possible, breathing through the mouth is great too.

Inhaling, bring the breath down into the belly.
Exhaling, send the breath up from the belly.

Inhale, the hands move away from each other
Exhale, they move back towards each other.

Not forcing the breath down, just allow it to move in and out of the belly.

Inhaling, sending the breath to the belly.
Exhaling, send it back up from the belly.

Allow the belly to be soft as it expands and contracts.

Breathing in and out of the belly.

# How you can provide support for Earlier Intervention

## #1

Being able to meet the needs of clients early in pregnancy may be different than when clients typically contact doulas.

Your client may not have told everyone in their life about the pregnancy, and may choose you as a confidante, wanting to talk often about symptoms and concerns.

## It is important to be supportive while still establishing boundaries.

Having a package, or packages of services available to meet the needs of such clients will protect and nurture both of you.

These services can include **early pregnancy preparation** and it may be useful to have resources to support your client during the first trimester, such as names of **doctors and midwives that you are familiar with**, alternative practitioners and advice on how to deal with nausea and fatigue.

## #2

It is important to follow the client's lead on how to proceed. They may be excited to talk about being pregnant, or they may be hesitant to "get their hopes up".

**Use whatever language they are using** and match their tone in order to help them feel most supported.

## #3

While it is up to your client to choose how they experience the current pregnancy you can **encourage them to be present with what is occuring in their body and mind**.

You can encourage your client to practice mindfulness. You can teach them this **Mindfulness Meditation practice** to encourage the regular practice of mindfulness.

# Mindfulness Meditation Script

*The following script was created by bebo mia for you to use with your clients.*

*Come into a comfortable position. You can be seated or lying down, though if you think you will fall asleep I suggest you sit up. If you are sitting, find a position where you can have a long spine, feet on the ground and sit comfortably still.*

*You can close your eyes here or just find a gentle unfocused downward gaze. We are going to begin a short mindfulness practice.*

*Begin to notice your breath here.*

*You don't need to do anything with the breath, just notice it. Notice the sound it makes as you inhale, the sound it makes as you exhale. Notice where you feel the breath in the belly. What moves, what softens.*

*I invite you to keep your awareness with your breath, and you can begin to label your breath. As you inhale, say silently to yourself "inhale".*

*As you exhale say silently to yourself "exhale".*

*If you become distracted, when you notice your awareness has drifted away, just say to yourself "thinking" and when you are ready, bring your awareness back to your breathing, labeling your inhale and your exhale.*

*Pause*

*Approach this with a non-judgemental attitude, there is no right or wrong here. Just continue to label your inhale, your exhale and your thinking.*

*Pause*

*It is extremely common for the mind to drift away in this type of practice. When you notice this has happened, label it and come back to noticing your breath. This awareness of your mind IS your mindfulness practice.*

*Pause*

*Your breath is always in the present moment, and it will always welcome your awareness.*

*Allow 1-2 minutes of silence.*

*Continue to label your inhales, your exhales and your thoughts.*

*Pause*

*After you label your next practice you can let this practice go. Take a moment or two to let your mind wander however it likes, holding all the thoughts it can.*

*Pause.*

*And now just continue to notice your breath, filling the body, emptying the body.  Notice any sounds the breath makes. When you are ready you can slowly flutter the eyes open.*

Click here to listen to the guided meditation!

# How you can help provide support for Mental Well Being

## #1

Acknowledge that what your client is going **through is normal**. It can be frustrating to get exactly what you wanted and still feel worry, anxiety or fear.

You can provide direct support by teaching your client basic relaxation techniques, within your scope of practice, including **breathwork, guided relaxation, visualizations and encouraging them to journal** and practice self-care rituals that they enjoy.

Some important pillars to keep in mind here are:
Having an understanding of how the stress response works; why it is important to encourage relaxation and what you can do to encourage relaxation.

## #2

Your client may have needs that you, as a doula, cannot meet, so it would be useful to have the names of therapists and counselors that can help support their mental health care.

Do not stigmatize these services, let them know that they are all part of their baby's care and an important part of their own care too.

# #3

It is also useful to understand the basics of the mental health medication they may be on.

Such medication is often stigmatized, especially when used by pregnant women, and current recommendation states that many antidepressants can be used safely, and are the healthiest choice for mothers living with depression.

Again, avoiding stigma and encouraging the client to make the healthiest choices for their family is the way to go here.

## #4

### If your client has experienced a previous loss they may be feeling anxiety, especially at the corresponding time they experienced the loss, and they may be feeling ambivalent about their current pregnancy.

Providing a safe space for them to express these feelings, if they choose to do so, is important. **Acknowledging that their feelings are natural and normal,** and encouraging them towards appropriate mental health care can be key components of this work.

You can encourage your client to practice mindfulness, through meditations you teach them or recommendations to local teachers or online practices.

While it is up to them to choose whether or not and how much to enjoy the current pregnancy, encouraging them to be present with it can be beneficial.

# Quick breathing tool for worry/anxiety

## Cyclic Breathing

One of the most accessible breathing tools for worry or anxiety is to practice some **mindful breathing**. You don't need to do anything to the breath, just notice it.

Sit down or lie down in a comfortable position. If you are sitting ensure that your shoulders are back and down, away from your ears. If you are lying down you may want to bend your knees so your lower back can relax. **Wherever you are just ensure you are comfortable**.

Let your face relax. Close your eyes or let them settle downward, whichever feels better for you. Allow the breath to flow naturally, in and out. Through the nose if possible. Otherwise breathing through the mouth is just fine.

Notice when the breath comes in

Notice when the breath comes out.

Just notice the flow. Notice the flow of the inhale. Notice the flow of the exhale.

Notice if the breath is fast. If it is slow. **Just notice them**.

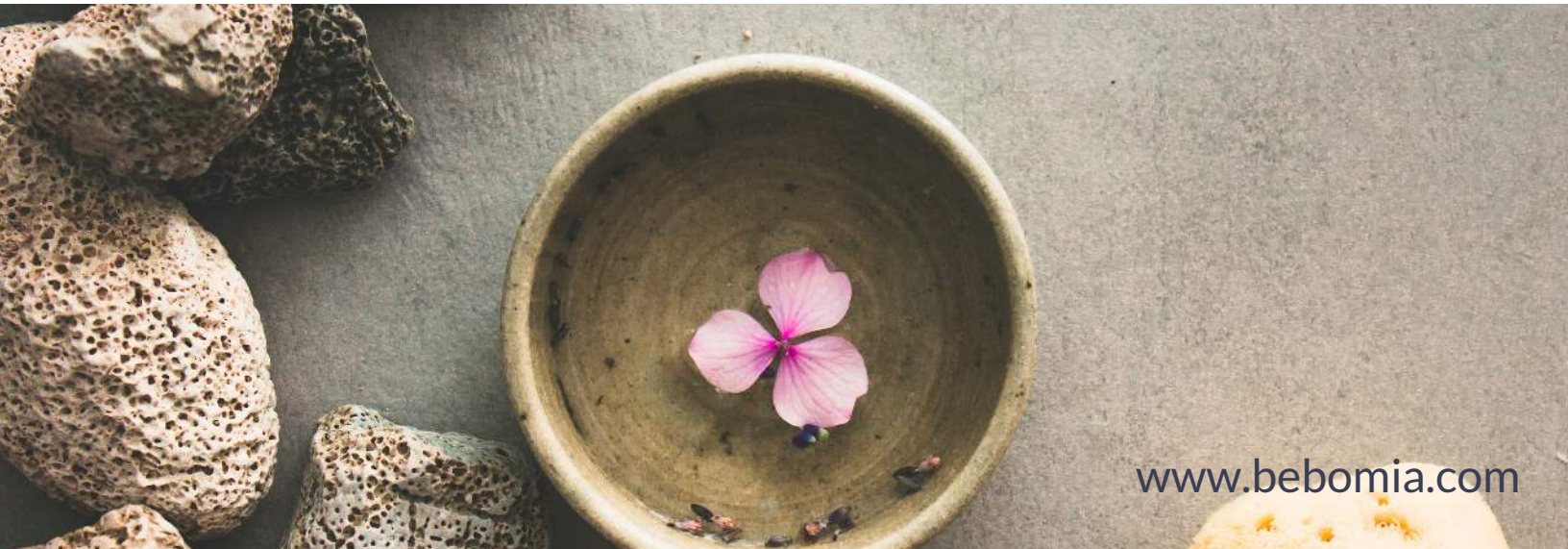
Begin to notice the space between the breaths. Notice the space between the inhale and the exhale. Notice the space between the exhale and the inhale.

You don't need to pause. Just notice, this space. **Notice the breath in, the space, the breath out, the space.**

Begin to notice that it is not really a space at all. But a continual flow of breath. As the inhale moves to the exhale and the exhale moves to the inhale.

(continue for a few minutes, with prompts if necessary).

When you are ready you can begin to let this practice go. You can begin to feel into your body. When you are ready flutter open your eyes.



# Basic Relaxation Guided Meditation Script

*The following script was created by bebo mia for you to use with your clients. Please note, if you are working with a client with severe mental health needs, please ensure they are receiving support from a mental health professional, in addition to your support.*

*You can do this practice lying down, or if it is more comfortable for you to sit up, do that. Find a position of ease. We are going to begin to guide the body to progressively relax.*

*With your next inhale bring your awareness to your* ***feet, all ten toes, and ankles.*** *With your next inhale engage all of these muscles, feeling them tighten. Engage, engage. And with your next exhale feel them relax completely.*

*Bring the awareness to your l****egs, lower legs, knees, thighs****. With your next inhale engage all of these muscles, feeling them tighten. Engage, engage. And with your next exhale feel them relax completely.*

*Bring the awareness to your **legs, lower legs, knees, thighs.** With your next inhale engage all of these muscles, feeling them tighten. Engage, engage. And with your next exhale feel them relax completely.*

*Bring your awareness to your **pelvic region, feeling the muscles of the bum, the hips, the pelvic floor**. With your next inhale engage all of these muscles, feeling them tighten. Engage, engage. And with your next exhale feel them relax completely.*

*Bring your awareness to your **stomach, your torso, your chest.** With your next inhale engage all of these muscles, feeling them tighten. Engage, engage. And with your next exhale feel them relax completely.*

*Bring your awareness to your whole **shoulders, the tops of the shoulders, the front of the shoulders, the back of the shoulders.** With the next inhale engage all of these muscles, feeling them tighten. Engage, engage. And with the next exhale feel them relax completely.*

*Bring your awareness to your **arms, upper arms, elbow, lower arms.** With your next inhale engage all of these muscles, feeling them tighten. Engage, engage. And with your next exhale feel them relax completely.*

*Bring your awareness to your **neck and head, your face, your jaw, your forehead.** With your next inhale engage all of these muscles, feeling them tighten. Engage, engage. And with your next exhale feel them relax completely.*

*Check in with your body. If there is anywhere holding onto any tension, just bring your awareness there and see if you can remind it to relax.*

*And now take your awareness to your breath. With each exhale, say to yourself "relax".*

## Additional cues for meditation on the next page!

# Additional Cues:

*- There is nothing else you need to do here, each time you exhale just say to yourself "relax"*

*- Continuing to breath naturally with each exhale saying to yourself relax.*

*- If you get distracted when you notice it just come back to noticing your exhale and saying to yourself "relax". There is no need for judgement here.*

*- Continue this for about 3-5 minutes.*

*- After your next exhale you can let this practice go. Begin to feel your body lying or sitting wherever it is. You can begin to add some movement to the body, wiggling fingers and toes, circling wrists and ankles. Take your time to add movement and get up slowly and with intention.*

Click here to listen to the guided meditation!

# How you can provide support for Holistic Care

Your client may be craving holistic care and as a doula you can help provide what you can, and refer to others for the care you can't provide.

Proving a **nurturing environment** can be as simple as having a warm cup of tea and full attention for your client.

This is yet another reason, why, as a doula you would want to **check in with your client's self care practices**, and encourage them towards such practices and recommended ones you think will be beneficial.

If you provide additional services let your clients know how important these can be to their mind-body care, and if you don't provide such services have a list of providers you can recommend and refer to.

If your client is expressing doubt over their body or the ability to give birth or parent, this could be a great time to encourage them to build confidence, **with this meditation.**

# Heart Womb Breathing Script

## Note regarding terms and anatomy and gender identity:

It is important to note here that not all clients will want to identify with the term womb.

If you are working with a client that is queer, gender non-conforming or transgender, be mindful of the terms that they use to connect to their baby before suggesting a "Heart Womb Breathing" exercise.

Do not make the assumption that a queer, GNC or trans birther doesn't want to refer to their womb either. This is where asking good questions is absolutely critical.

Let your client know about the Heart Womb Breathing exercise and ask them how those terms feel to them. Ask them if there are different terms they would rather use. Always let the client lead the relationship as far as terms go.

*Get settled in a comfortable seated position. Sit in a way that allows your back to be long and your heart open, and also provides comfort and ease for your body. You can practice this with your eyes closed or softly lowered.*

*Bring your left hand to your heart. Prace your right hand on top of your left. Begin to take some breaths, right to your heart, as if your heart could fill with every breath.*

*Let these breaths be full of love, inhaling love to your heart with each breath. Continuing to inhale love, allow each exhale to be one of gratitude. Inhaling love to the heart, exhaling gratitude. Inhaling love, exhaling gratitude*

*Pause*

*When it feels as though your heart is full of love, I invite you to take your top hand from your heart, to your womb, as if you were creating a chain right from your heart to your womb.*

*You can place your hand wherever the connection to your womb space feels strongest for you.*

*Allow the inhale to travel to your womb, each inhale breathing right to the womb. Inhaling love to your womb, exhaling gratitude from your heart. Inhale love, exhale gratitude. Inhale to your womb. Exhale from your heart.*

*Pause*

*After your next exhale, with your womb full of love, you can think of strengthening that heart womb connection even more, taking your right hand back to your heart.*

*Know this connection between heart and womb is always there. You are always able to fill yourself with love and gratitude.*

*After your next exhale you can let this practice go, allowing your breath to return to normal. When you are ready you can softly flutter the eyes open.*

Click here to listen to the guided meditation!

# How you can help meet the need for increased and flexible birth support.

If your client has always wanted a particular kind of birth and has been told it is not possible for them, this can be difficult, as it would be for any client.

The fact that it may be added to disappointment around means of conception, additional stress and mental unwellness can increase this disappointment.

As a doula you can help bridge the gap between your client's "dream birth" and their reality, in order to work towards a positive birth experience.

If your client is expressing disappointment or anger towards current birth limitations it may be useful to:

## #1

Ask them to tell you about their dream birth plan and encourage them to think about why they have these particular desires.

## #2

## Discuss how you can still work towards some of these hopes, even if they are not having their "dream birth".

For instance, if they wanted a home birth because they want to avoid an epidural, work with them to discuss pain management techniques as well as creating a plan to ensure staff is aware of this desire.

If they are disappointed to learn they will need to have a c-section encourage them to look into vaginal microbe swiping and to speak with their doctor about a more patient led belly birth.

Here are a few breaths they can practice to prepare for relaxation at any type of birth. What is it about their original birth plan, any feelings or important items, that can be moved over into this new birth plan?

## #3

Remind them that they are doing an amazing job at growing their baby and to celebrate what their body is now doing to support this pregnancy.

Noticing and recognizing what their body can do is a great way to build confidence. This is a great time to practice being honest with oneself and in asking for what they need. This will come in handy during parenting!

## #4

Continue to reassure your client that their body is made to be pregnant and give birth, conception is a different bodily function and 'intervention going in, does not mean intervention coming out' like we often hear.

Encourage them to offer love and kindness to their body, their whole selves, and everyone who has supported them on their journey with this loving-kindness (meta) meditation.

# Loving Kindness Meditation Script

*Come to a comfortable lying down position. You can lie on your back or on your side, wherever you are comfortable.*

*Allow your breath to be natural and at ease. Just notice your breath here, gentle flowing. Inhale. Exhale. Inhale. Exhale.*

*You don't need to be DOING anything here, just follow the sound of my voice.*

*I am going to read out some thoughts and awareness, and I encourage you to breathe them in and out, as we encourage some loving kindness to ourselves and others*

*You can begin by bringing awareness to yourself, lying here. Just keep your awareness with yourself.  And wishing yourself...*

*May I be happy and healthy.*
*May I be both peaceful and at ease.*
*May I be empowered to care for myself and others with gentle strength.*

*Take a moment to breathe in these thoughts, truly wishing for well being for yourself today.*

*Take your awareness now to someone you love. A partner, a friend, a child, outside or inside the womb, a pet. Anyone who you love in an uncomplicated way.  Wishing this person...*

*May you be happy and healthy.*
*May you be peaceful and at ease.*
*May you be empowered to care for yourself and others with gentle strength.*

*Take a moment to breathe in these thoughts, truly wishing for well being for this beloved person or pet.*

*Take your awareness now to someone who has supported you on this fertility journey. Maybe it is the same loved person, maybe a care provider, or someone else. Wishing this person...*

*May you be happy and healthy.*
*May you be peaceful and at ease.*
*May you be empowered to care for yourself and others with gentle strength.*
*Take a moment to breathe in these thoughts, truly wishing for well being for this supportive person.*

*Take your awareness now to all the other mothers and birthers out there who are growing and loving babies. However they created their families, just bring your awareness to this whole circle of loving parents. Wishing them...*

*May you be happy and healthy.*
*May you be peaceful and at ease.*
*May you be empowered to care for yourself and others with gentle strength.*

*Take a moment to breathe in these thoughts, truly wishing for well being for all of these families.*

*And now bring your awareness back to yourself. You, your body doing this amazing work of growing and caring for a new human being. Wish yourself again...*

*May I be happy and healthy.*
*May I be both peaceful and at ease.*
*May I be empowered to care for myself and others with gentle strength.*
*Take a moment to breathe in these thoughts, truly wishing for well being for yourself today.*

*When you are ready you can bring your awareness back to your breath. Feeling the breath enter the body. Feeling it leave the body. Breathing here.*

*When you are ready you can add a bit more movement, there is no rush, lay in this feeling of loving kindness as long as you like. And at your own pace roll to your side, if you are not already there, before sitting up.*

Click here to listen to the guided meditation!

# Reminder: Take care of yourself.

As a doula you may already know how important self-care is. While important when working with any client, self care can be even more so when working with a client who has previously gone through fertility treatment, due to their additional needs.

Remember to set boundaries, especially around time and towards what care you can honestly provide. If you have previously gone through fertility work yourself you may feel triggered.

Acknowledge to yourself that all feelings are valid and seek out a friend or support person to speak to.

Even if you have not gone through any sort of fertility treatment it may be overwhelming to learn about what others have gone through to become pregnant, and while you should never “dump” back on to your clients, it is important to discuss this with a trusted listener.

# Fertility Specialist Certification

We hope this guide equips you with the tools that you need to provide care for your current or future clients who have previously undergone fertility issues and/or fertility treatment.

If you are interested in adding fertility support to your list of services you will definitely want to take a look at our **Fertility Specialist Certification.**

www.bebomia.com