

Celebrating Motherhood: Special Ways to Welcome New Moms

By Zoë Etkin



The baby shower: a pre-baby must in America. In some ways, they are a necessity (hey, how else are we supposed to accumulate all those baby gadgets?), but with most of the focus on baby, a new mom can get lost amongst the excitement. Don't get me wrong, babies should be celebrated, they're awesome. But so are moms! Around the world there are beautiful ceremonies and rituals to honor the new mother, but in mainstream American culture, we are sorely lacking. Many mothers have to return to work quickly after the birth of their child, and others lack family support in the postpartum period. Our culture doesn't foster a time and space for new mothers to be celebrated, so they usually aren't. Fortunately, there is a growing movement to change that. Women are coming together in circles, and they are sending their friends, daughters, sisters into motherhood with love and care.

Bless Her

A popular pre-birth ceremony is called a *Mother Blessing*. This pampering event can be done in place of or in addition to a baby shower. The origins of the Mother Blessing are rooted in the Navajo Blessingway, a ceremony performed over the course of several days to mark important life events (first menstruation and pregnancy, for example). Although there are several common rituals performed at Mother Blessings, it is truly a customizable affair. Invite friends to bring a

special bead for the mother's birth necklace. Give out candles for the guests to light when the mother is in labor. Read poems or wise words to her. Have guests share about their own mothering journeys. Lie the mother down on a comfortable bed of pillows and have everyone pamper her (massage, manicures). Bathe her in a milky bath filled with rose petals and herbs. The possibilities are endless—the point is to give the mama lots of love before she crosses the threshold into motherhood.

Gifting

Undoubtedly this new family will receive a lot of gifts for the baby. Rather than adding to a pile of clothing the baby can only wear for a few weeks, gift your mama friend self-care oriented items that will make her feel loved in the postpartum. It's nice to include some necessities mixed in with a few fun items. New mama will appreciate a basket that includes: nipple cream, sitz bath spray, Mother's Milk tea, a yummy smelling soap or lotion, a large water bottle, a pretty journal, a tiny bottle of champagne, a lip balm, and maybe a few easy to eat (and healthy) snack foods. Even better, include in your card that you are organizing a meal train for her that will begin the day after she gives birth. Knowing warm, delicious meals are coming when you're a few days in to nursing and caring for a new baby will be a lifesaver for the whole family.

Postpartum

New mothers are open. They have opened their bodies to birth their babies, and they have opened their hearts and minds to the experience of stepping in to a new role in their lives. Just as we mark the opening of the journey, we too must mark the close. The Mexican tradition of *Closing the Bones* is a ceremony where the mother is bound firmly from her head to her toes with a shawl called a rebozo. The process aims to literally close her bones that have opened to accommodate pregnancy and birth, and to metaphorically close one chapter of the woman's journey. Inspired by this practice, doulas and other birth workers are offering various adaptations of this ceremony to their clients. Others are doing hip and belly binding, postpartum Ayurvedic massage, and other cultural traditions to nourish and pamper new moms. It can be deeply grounding for mothers to investigate the postpartum practices of their own culture and find ways of incorporating those, and the others mentioned, into their postpartum time. Ask your mama friend how you can best serve her in the postpartum period and if she would like to participate in a ritual or ceremony to seal her birth experience. You can begin by drawing her a warm bath and offering her tea. Hold the baby while she soaks and offer an ear if she'd like to share her birth story with you. Then, perform a bone closing or binding ceremony, should she be interested, or simply give her a shoulder rub and make her lunch. Bring something to read to her, or write down something you can say together. In many traditions, walking through a doorway signifies passing into a new phase of life. A simple ritual can be made by passing the threshold with a few sweet words to say. Help this new mother

mark the profound experience she has had giving birth. It will allow her to step into her new role knowing she has support and positivity surrounding her.

Humans have always craved ritual. It is in our blood to create special celebrations and ceremonies for the significant events in our lives. We certainly place a lot of value on weddings, funerals, birthdays and holidays. But there's more to a birthday than someone growing another year older. Behind each of us is a mother who worked very hard helping us come into the world and she deserves so much celebration, reverence and care. Let's honor the mothers, from the beginning of the journey through the postpartum period, so they feel supported in what can be a very intense transition. There are many cultures to look to for inspiration when it comes to creating motherhood celebration ceremonies, but I encourage you to create your own, authentic rituals, that are rooted in the values of the mother you are celebrating. You won't go wrong with a celebration that includes some thoughtfully written words, a candle or two, some mama pampering and a good meal.

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