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## The Imperative of Equitable, Accessible Childbirth Education

### Introduction

The abysmal, worsening perinatal morbidity and mortality rates in the US are fueled by large disparities in the treatment of Black individuals<sup>1</sup>. Black and Brown families deserve equitable access to childbirth classes that prepare them for the realities of birth while bolstering their community connections. It is necessary to prioritize classes that center Black joy, where parents are safely supported in exploring and voicing their goals and desires for birth, and where evidence around typical birthcare interventions is shared. Childbirth education must address the racism-driven disparities in birthcare outcomes, and research demonstrates the importance of cultural-congruence between students and instructors of color with lived experience navigating these issues<sup>2</sup>.

### Content

Your BIRTH Partners' (YBP) Evidence Based Birth (EBB®) Childbirth Class Imperative was created in response to the call for accessible childbirth education that meets the needs of Black and Brown families navigating the tremendous inequities in our current birthcare environment. The partnership between YBP, a 501c3 non-profit organization, and the above named EBB® mentors & instructors developed due to our shared interest in cultivating birthcare communities rooted in autonomy, respect, and equity. The EBB® organization prioritizes the provision of accurate childbirth information by synthesizing research findings so families are aware of current evidence-based care and prepared to advocate for themselves.<sup>3</sup> Our mentor partners have been serving birthing families in their communities for decades; their passion and awareness of local birthing places, providers, and policies informs their practice. YBP provides funding for all Imperative class

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<sup>1</sup> March of Dimes. (2021). [Birthing While Black: Examining America's Black Maternal Health Crisis](#).

<sup>2</sup> Taylor, J., Novoa, C., Hamm, K., & Phadke, S. (2019). [Eliminating Racial Disparities in Maternal and Infant Mortality: A Comprehensive Policy Blueprint](#)

<sup>3</sup> Gluck, O., Pinchas-Cohen, T., Hiaev, Z., Rubinstein, H., Bar, J., Kovo, M. (2020). [The impact of childbirth education classes on delivery outcome](#).

costs; grants are distributed to the mentors to eliminate the financial burden of a reimbursement model on students.

## Practice Application

This initiative was piloted with 19 families in 2021 spread out across New Jersey, New York, and Texas. Class sizes ranged from private instruction up to 6 families per class depending on the needs of the family and their anticipated birthing time. The six week class series is offered virtually to account for a shifting pandemic landscape and remain parent-centered with an option for an in-person element dependent on the individual cohort's preferences. Small class instruction encourages deep diving into the topics from each content module with time for application of real-life examples and answering questions pertaining to the individual concerns of each family.

**Outcomes:** Parent feedback has been very encouraging: A.S. says *"I feel so prepared for birth, I can't thank you enough for being so supportive and informative,"* S.G. shares *"you had all the tools to self-advocate,"* and K.C. states *"we love the community we created."* C.P. explains *"As a first time Mom and a Black Woman, Black Maternal Health is super important to me. I wanted to make sure that I understood the birthing process, and was educated on all of the options available to me...I had a few friends ask me if I would take the EBB course again, during my future pregnancies and the answer is "of course!"* This warmth is echoed by instructor Sasha Sumling: *"mentoring Black and Brown Families with EBB Childbirth Classes is gratifying, especially the younger adults 21-25 years of age. They start the classes with so much unknown and end the classes empowered, able to self advocate, and use a voice they never knew they had. The "Comfort Measures Rehearsal" is one of my favorites. I had the opportunity to teach it in-person during the pandemic. The families were engaged and eager to participate. It was almost like a family reunion. We communed virtually for 5 weeks then finally met up with open arms. No more air hugs! Fun fact: I hosted one of my mommas in class despite the fact that she was in early labor. She was determined to get her comfort measures rehearsal in, so she can be well prepared for her birthing time."*

**Opportunities:** A new survey developed for upcoming cohorts will gain more insights into

their education experiences, birth, and postpartum outcomes. YBP has expanded this initiative in 2022 with ambitions of supporting 64 or more families, and is pursuing additional funding.