

Our Baby, My Body

Tom and Melinda are about to have a baby together. They are both committed to raising the child together as a family, and they have made many of the decisions about how they're going to raise the child as a team. Recently, though, Melinda has been engaging in activities that Tom thinks are unnecessarily risky for the health of their future child. She has continued going into work instead of working from home when her employees have reported they are sick with COVID-19. Tom has mentioned that the most recent information shows that there are risks for the pregnancy if Melinda catches COVID-19, including a pre-term birth or stillbirth. She also continues to exert herself physically more than Tom thinks is necessary for her or healthy for the baby.

Tom believes that, since he is an equal partner in raising the child, he should have an equal say in how Melinda acts when it comes to the health of the child. He does not think it is unfair of him to tell Melinda that she needs to work from home when her co-workers are sick, or to insist that she stop exerting herself around the house and let him do the chores. After all, it is his child too, and just like all of the other decisions that they've made about how they are going to raise it, he thinks that the decisions Melinda makes that would affect the child should be equally open for discussion (and even potential veto).

Melinda, on the other hand, believes that Tom is being overbearing and controlling. She believes that, until the baby is born, it is her body, and she is free to do what she wants. As long as she is carrying their child, she says, her wants and desires will always outweigh Tom's because he is not the one that has to live with the pregnancy. Tom is free to offer his input, and she will always take it into consideration out of respect for him as a partner, but the final decision is hers. She argues that Tom is being unfair and has no right to be upset when she acts contrary to his desires.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Are Tom and Melinda truly equal partners during the pregnancy, or do Melinda's concerns for her own autonomy take precedence?
2. What sort of responsibilities does Melinda have toward Tom and his concerns as the father of the child she's carrying?
3. Do Tom and Melinda's respective shares in decision-making change *after* the baby is born? If so, how and why?

