

MOM JESSICA

When RosAnne, a nurse with Nurse-Family Partnership® (NFP), started meeting with Jessica at her home in Houston, Tex., she noticed that the young first-time mom was very sweet and self-effacing. It was a big part of Jessica's personality to always put others first.

"I was very shy," Jessica admitted, "and I was very insecure about being a mom."

So, gently and patiently, NFP nurse RosAnne began teaching Jessica how to communicate her own needs.

"I found myself having to be skilled at asking her specific questions to help her see that everything she was saying was centered on other people," said RosAnne, who works at NFP at the Houston Department of Health & Human Services. "We started talking about how it's always good to be kind and generous and to help other people, but you need to be able to be strong and take care of yourself."

Nurse-Family Partnership supports each mom in learning how to bravely and boldly advocate for herself and insisting she receive the health care she needs when she knows something is not right.



Jessica, shown here with her son, Israel, spoke up for herself when he was born.

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LEARNING HOW TO ADVOCATE FOR MYSELF HAS MADE ME ABLE TO GO HARDER AND STRONGER FOR MY SON. IT HAS MADE ME A BETTER MOTHER.

Looking back, Jessica said, this simple message saved her life.

On Jan. 26 when her son, Israel, was born via C-section, Jessica was in the recovery room with her newborn baby and her mom when she suddenly realized something was wrong.

"I started to feel really weak," she said, and when a nurse came to check on her, Jessica told her she didn't feel well. The nurse brought her some ice chips, but Jessica continued to feel weak and noticed that she was passing more blood clots than seemed right.

"The nurse told me that was normal and not to worry," she said.

When the nurse came back to check on her, Jessica told her it felt like she was passing a lot of blood clots. The nurse told her that it just feels like a lot. But Jessica said she felt like her body was shutting down.

After the nurse left the room, Jessica asked her mother to take the baby. "I told her that I didn't feel well and I thought I was about to pass out."

Disoriented and scared, she scooted to the edge of the bed and started pulling at her gown and the monitors attached to her body. Then she blacked out.

Jessica said she later learned her mother called a nurse for help and the nurse who had been with her for delivery arrived quickly and called a team to the room.

She was hemorrhaging and her blood pressure was dangerously low.

“I was dying,” Jessica said she learned later.

When she regained consciousness, someone was on top of her doing chest compressions and nurses and doctors were all around her bed working to restore her blood pressure and stop the hemorrhaging.

Hemorrhaging is a leading cause of maternal death in the U.S. This episode was a near miss and was a critical moment in Jessica receiving the medical attention she needed to save her life.

Later, the nurse who had helped her in the delivery room stopped in again to check on her before she went home for the day. When she saw how frail she was, she stayed with her that night to make sure she recovered.

The nurse told her, “You could have lost your life. It’s a good thing you spoke up.”

She credits NFP nurse RosAnne with teaching her how to do just that.

“She taught me how to trust myself and my feelings and to trust my body,” Jessica said. “She taught me how to speak up without being rude.”

RosAnne said it was all about building Jessica’s confidence. “I reminded her that she is smart, beautiful and capable, and that her baby is in good hands.

“I simply was helping her understand how important her personal goals are. It takes courage to speak up for yourself and say, ‘I’m not going to accept this.’ ”

The lessons have been enormously valuable for Jessica in all aspects of her life.

At her job, she has been a more effective advocate for herself when she has needed flexibility to deal



Jessica wants to show her son Israel that he can do anything.

with any health problems she and Israel have experienced.

“Learning how to advocate for myself has made me able to go harder and stronger for my son,” she said. “It has made me a better mother.”

She’s working in revenue management and medical billing at the University of Texas Health System and recently won a scholarship to go to college. She hopes to enroll in the fall.

“I want to create a stable environment for my family,” she said, “and to show Israel you can do anything you want to do.”

While Jessica enjoys a good relationship with her mom, she feels a different, special bond with NFP nurse RosAnne.

“She is awesome. I can talk to her about anything,” she said. “I really hate that this program is only two years.”

RosAnne sees a bright future for Jessica and Israel. “Jessica is a hard worker,” she said. “She loves that little boy and she puts him first. They’re going to be fine.”

Jessica was always good at listening to other people, RosAnne said. “I wanted her to know it was important for people to listen to her, too.”

The message was incredibly empowering to the 27-year-old mom.

“Because of her, a lot of life has been fed into me,” said Jessica. “I’m so, so grateful.”