



## **Professional Labor Support**

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### **What is a doula?**

"Doula" refers to a supportive companion who is professionally trained to provide labor support. There is also a postpartum doula, who provides support during the postpartum period. We will be referring mostly to labor doulas.

A doula performs no medical tasks. Instead, she provides physical, emotional, and informational support to women and their partners during labor and birth. She gives help and advice on comfort measures such as breathing, relaxation, massage, and positioning. She assists families in gathering information about their options for labor. She usually will meet with the family at least once before the birth, to build a rapport. She provides continuous emotional reassurance and comfort. She has important, though non-medical, skills such as massage and reflexology. She knows many comfort measures for the laboring woman. She assists the partner in playing an active role in the birth. She helps the woman have a spiritual, satisfying birth.

### **Who needs a doula?**

Whether they be first time moms, VBAC moms, moms having cesareans, or moms wanting a natural birth, all of these moms and their partners could benefit from having a doula. As a first time mom, it is helpful to have someone there who knows what's happening. A VBAC mom can benefit greatly from the reassurance a doula continuously gives. A mom having a cesarean can be comforted by her doula. Moms wanting less intervention can greatly increase their chances of a satisfying birth by having a doula as a part of their birth team.

Do I think every mom could benefit from having a doula attend her birth? Yes, I do. Who couldn't benefit from extra support during labor? Most moms I know could. But what about their partners? Can dads benefit from having a doula?

### **Do Dads need Doulas?**

After the birth of my third baby (a VBA2C), my husband actually said, "I think she was there more for me than you." I almost fell over laughing. This was coming from the guy who said he didn't want a doula! He wondered what his role was supposed to be with her there. Then he decided he would (gladly) wait in the hall. I was afraid he wouldn't be involved at the birth at all. He was great! He helped do leg/knee pushes, walked the halls with me, and was the opposite team in a bed sheet tug of war (helped during the pushing stage). He was involved because of the direction from my doula.

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Instead of feeling replaced by Twyla, he felt support, and guidance. We expect so much from our partners- but they haven't (first time or VBAC dads) done this before, either. They are in need of the same kind of reassurance that moms are. Their experience can also be enhanced by having a doula.

### **When should I hire a doula?**

It is nice to meet and talk with doulas in your area early in your pregnancy. Most doulas only take a few clients a month and you will want to get on her schedule. She may be a source of information and prenatal support, also. She may be able to point you toward a good care provider, childbirth classes, or good books.

### **Where do I find a doula?**

You can find a doula by searching the databases for the certifying bodies for doulas via their websites. You can find one through your childbirth educator, or midwife. Your hospital may also have references. Ask around. Call her and set up an appointment to meet. During the visit, ask yourself if she communicates well. Does she listen well? Do your personalities mesh well?

### **A Doula's Birth Philosophy**

"I feel so passionate about birth and the difference it can make in a woman's life... forever. It is time we make the choices for our own care and that of our sweet babies. I am so grateful for the many wonderful experiences I have had as a doula. It is such an honor to help these moms through each stage of labor and birth. Every birth is different and so special. Birth is a beautiful and extremely spiritual experience. I believe birth is a healthy and natural process, not a high tech medical event or illness. Women CAN birth naturally and gently. All it takes is: good health, education, support, and a good care provider. I believe in women, I believe in birth!"

*--Twyla Cluster, doula, mom, and friend*

### **A Doula Provides...**

- emotional support
- explanations of medical procedures
- advice during pregnancy



- exercise and physical suggestions to make pregnancy more comfortable
- help with preparing a birth plan
- massage and other non-pharmaceutical pain relief measures
- positioning suggestions during labor and birth
- support for the partner
- help with breast-feeding preparation-written record of birth
- may have other talents that vary.

### **Questions to ask a prospective doula:**

- What training have you had?
- Are you certified?
- What have been your experiences with birth, personally and as a doula?
- What types of birth have you witnessed? i.e. cesarean, natural, VBAC, breech
- What is your philosophy about childbirth and supporting women and their partners through labor?
- What do you see your role as in early labor, labor, and birth?
- May we call you with questions/concerns before the birth?
- What care providers have you worked with?
- In what hospitals have you attended births?
- Have you attended home births?
- When do you try to join women in labor?
- Will you come to our home for early labor?
- Do you have any other clients due near my due date?
- How many clients do you have a month?
- Do you have a back-up doula? Who is she?
- What is your fee? Is any part of your fee refundable if you do not attend the birth?
- What does the fee include?
- Can you provide references?