

FAQ – Doula Services Provided by Angie Evans

What's a doula?

A doula is a woman experienced in childbirth who provides continuous physical, emotional and informational support to the mother and partner during pregnancy, birth & early post-partum. In much of the world today and throughout history, women support women through labour & birth.

Where's that name from?

In ancient Greece “doula” meant the highest female servant who helped the lady of the house through child-bearing. Medical researchers Marshall Klaus and John Kennell, who conducted several randomized clinical trials on the medical outcomes of doula attended births, adopted the term to refer to labour support as well as prenatal and postpartum support.

What's the difference between a midwife and a doula?

Midwives are highly trained in the medical aspects of birth. They carry oxygen, medicines, resuscitation equipment and other gear, and are known as primary care-givers during birth. The midwife's role replaces that of a medical doctor.

Doulas provide non-medical support. They do not perform clinical tasks such as heart rate checks, or vaginal exams but rather use encouragement, massage, aromatherapy, reflexology, positioning suggestions, etc., to help labor progress as well as possible.

How does a doula assist with communication in hospitals during labor & birth?

During prenatal meetings doulas learn what's important to a couple and discuss how to make informed decisions. A doula may remind or encourage a client to ask the questions necessary to understand a procedure – why it's recommended and what happens. Doulas do not speak on a client's behalf nor intervene in their clinical care. We do not make decisions for clients, nor judge the decisions clients' make, but are there to support those decisions.

Why choose a doula over simply a friend or family member as support?

Doulas are trained and experienced in childbirth support. They know the sounds and behaviors of laboring women, and what that may indicate about their progress. Doulas are trained in pain-reducing comfort measures, natural methods to keep labor progressing, and to support both the laboring woman and her partner. Doulas are familiar with local hospital policies & practices and have often built a rapport with the doctors, nurses and midwives.

Many hospitals will accommodate a woman's request to have her partner, doula and another female support person in attendance. Homebirths and birth centers definitely encourage women to have all the support they wish.

How does the doula fit in with nursing staff?

Doulas do not replace nurses or other medical staff, but rather work as part of the team. They are there to comfort and support the mother & her partner. Nurses change shifts; doulas stay throughout the process.

What difference does the presence of a trained doula have on birth outcomes?

The presence of a doula tends to result in shorter labours with fewer complications and less interventions. When a doula is present during and after childbirth, women report greater satisfaction with their birth experience, make more positive assessments of their babies, have fewer caesareans and requests for medical intervention, and less postpartum depression. In case

of unplanned circumstances, doula support helps reduce negative feelings about one's childbirth experience. Studies ^{1,2,3,4} have shown that babies born with doulas present tend to have shorter hospital stays with fewer admissions to special care nurseries, breastfeed more easily and have more affectionate mothers in the postpartum period.

- 50% reduction in the caesarean rate
- 25% shorter labour
- 60% reduction in epidural requests
- 40% reduction in oxytocin use
- 30% reduction in analgesia use
- 40% reduction in forceps delivery

Will a doula make my partner feel unnecessary?

A responsible doula compliments and enhances the father/partner in his/her supportive role rather than acting as a replacement. (While I acknowledge people's individual circumstances, I will use "father" words for most of this paragraph.) The presence of a doula allows the father to be able to support his partner emotionally during labor & birth and also enjoy it himself without the pressure to remember everything he learned in childbirth class! The father typically has little-to-no actual experience in dealing with the often-subtle forces of the labor process, yet they're expected to act as a labour coach. Some partners feel (accurately) that this is a huge expectation. Many fathers experience the birth as an emotional journey of their own and find it hard to be objective in such a situation. A doula is supportive to both the mother and her partner, and plays a crucial role in helping a partner become involved in the birth to the extent he/she feels comfortable. Studies have shown that fathers usually participate more actively during labor with the presence of a doula than without one.

When a couple works well together during the birth process they're better able to handle the challenges of early parenthood. An incredible bond can form or be made stronger. For that reason I teach a men's prenatal class to help dads prepare for the birth and early fatherhood. The class is meant to honor the dad's journey and also give him tools to be an effective partner through birth and early parenthood.

What if I planned a drug-free birth then change my mind during labour?

Doulas don't make decisions for clients or intervene in their clinical care, nor do they judge women's choices. She provides informational & emotional support while respecting a woman's decisions.

Are doulas only useful if planning an un-medicated birth?

The presence of a doula can be beneficial no matter what type of birth you are planning. In fact, women who choose a medicated birth need as much support as those who choose a natural birth, but a different kind of support. Most women do report needing fewer interventions when they have a doula. The role of the doula is to help attain a safe and pleasant birth, not to choose the type of birth. For women who know they want a medicated birth, the doula still provides emotional support, informational support and comfort measures to help the women through labor

¹ Klaus, M.H.; Kennel, J.H.; Berkowitz, G.; Klaus, P. "Maternal Assistance and Support in Labor: Father, Nurse, Midwife or Doula?" *Clinical Consultations in Obstetrics and Gynecology* 4 (December 1992).

² Sauls, D.J. Effects of labor support on mothers, babies, and birth outcomes. *J Obstet Gynecol Neonatal Nurs.* 2002 Nov-Dec; 31(6):733-41.

³ O'Driscoll, K. and Meagher, D. *Active Management of Labor.* 2d ed. London: Bailliere Tindall, 1986.

⁴ Klaus, M.H. and Kennel, J.H. *Parent-Infant Bonding.* St. Louis: C.V. Mosby, 1982.

and the administration of medications. Doulas can help mom deal with possible side affects and by filling in the gap that medication may not cover; rarely does medication take all discomfort away.

For a mother who faces a cesarean a doula can be helpful by providing support and encouragement. Often a cesarean is an unexpected situation and moms are left feeling unprepared, disappointed and lonely. In this case doula support is especially helpful during the early post-partum period.

What kind of comfort measures do you use during the labour & birth process?

While there are common comfort measures taught in doula training courses, each doula also brings her own additional tools and methods. Mine include the following:

- Positioning suggestions
- Massage & various touch methods
- Homeopathy & Bach Flowers (optional; no extra charge)
- Aromatherapy
- Encouragement & reassurance
- Heat or cold as desired
- Recommendations for partner to offer better support
- Create space for partner
- A calm, reassuring presence

How often do we meet?

Optimally we meet 5 times before the birth, as long as we begin working together early enough in your pregnancy. More meeting time is available by request. After your baby is born there will be a minimum of one postpartum visit, more if needed or desired.

When do we call you in labour?

I appreciate being notified at the first signs of suspected labour. We'll discuss what these are. From then on you'll keep me posted on your progress and what's happening.

When and where do you join us in labour?

When you need extra support. When depends on the woman, her partner, and the labour. Early support often takes the form of checking in by phone and/or dropping by your place. A labour support doula joins a labouring woman either at her home or in hospital or birth center and remains with her until a few hours after the birth.