

What is a Doula?

A doula is someone who provides non-clinical support and care to a woman (and her partner) during childbirth and the postpartum period.

Women have complex needs during childbirth. In addition to the safety of modern obstetrical care, and the love and companionship provided by their partners, women need consistent, continuous reassurance, comfort, encouragement and respect. They need individualized care based on their circumstances and preferences. To this end, a doula works with a woman and her family, physicians, midwives and nurses with an aim to enhance communication and understanding.

With a Doula present, the pressure on the partner is also decreased, allowing participation at an optimum comfort level and increasing the enjoyment of the birth of the baby. Ideally, the Doula and the partner make the perfect support team for the woman, complementing each other's strengths.

Why Hire a Doula?

Studies indicate that when a Doula is present, labours tend to be shorter with less need for technical aid, and there is greater maternal satisfaction. Doulas help foster a more relaxed postpartum environment as well, and enhance early mother-infant relationships, breastfeeding and family adjustments.

Birth and Postpartum Doulas

Doula C.A.R.E. **Birth Doulas:**

- Understand the physiology of birth and the emotional needs of a woman in labour
- Assist the woman and her partner in preparing for and carrying out her plans for birth
- Provide continuity of care, emotional support, physical comfort measures, an objective viewpoint
- Help the woman and her partner obtain information they need to make good decisions

It is important to note that a birth doula does not replace the woman's partner or care providers, nor make decisions for (or speak instead of) her client. In addition, at no time will a birth doula perform clinical or medical tasks, such as taking blood pressure or temperature, fetal heart tones, vaginal exams or postpartum clinical care.

Doula C.A.R.E. **Postpartum Doulas**

recognize the importance and challenges of family adjustment following the birth of a baby. Services are usually customized to meet the specific needs of the family, but may include:

- Reassurance and support to help parents feel comfortable and confident with their babies
- Breastfeeding support
- Practical hands-on help such as meal preparation, light housekeeping, laundry and short errands
- Provide relief childcare / sibling care

Overall, a postpartum doula will "mother the new mother" so that she and her loved ones ease into their new roles confidently and smoothly. The quality of emotional care received by the mother during labour, birth and immediately afterwards is a vital factor that can strengthen the emotional ties between the mother and child. The importance of this relationship cannot be over emphasized, since these early relationships largely determine the future of each family, and also society as a whole.

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