

# Emotional Processing

## *The doula can help the birth-giver clarify, express, and resolve her emotions*

To help the birth-giver clarify her real feelings and needs, the doula must listen carefully to decipher the woman's thoughts and words, and then rephrase them to verify what they really mean for her. The doula validates the woman's feelings, helps reframe any distress, and if necessary, redirects the mother's perceptions and worries.

The doula needs communication and attunement skills in order to handle this effectively, including **reflective listening**.

The birth-giver needs the doula to tune into and accept her real feelings even if they seem contrary, confused, or contradictory. In this vulnerable state, where there is no turning back, a woman is sensitive to being shamed or humiliated, to feeling abandoned or neglected. She needs to be able to express the full range of her feelings—positive and negative, and shifting moods, her fears, worries, and needs.

**Keep in mind:**  
**Never insist that your interpretation of her feelings is the correct one, avoid rigid assumptions, and do not put your agenda first.**

## Using reflective (*active*) listening

### Observe body cues and expressions and be solicitous

“Are you thirsty, cold, etc.?”

“Let's see what could help you be more comfortable.”

“Would it help to walk around a little—let's try it.”

“Let's turn down the lights, are you feeling exposed?”

“What are you feeling now?”

### Check in at appropriate intervals

“What's going through your mind?”

“I'm wondering what you are experiencing right now?”

“I noticed you seemed to become more quiet right then,

I wonder what you're feeling?”

“What would help you now?”

### Rephrase back what she has just said, adding a possible context to build on.

**She:** “I need space, don't touch me.”

**You:** “You really want to be sure that people ask first before they touch you or interrupt your space.”

### If she is struggling to express herself, venture a guess as to what she may be feeling:

“Sometimes it's hard to concentrate on labor when there are a lot of people in the room. I wonder if you might be more comfortable with less people in the room.”

“You seem a little scared now. You probably don't want any strangers to examine you right now? Would it feel too invasive? It makes sense to not want to be interrupted when you're working so hard with your own labor. Perhaps we could tell the nurse that you prefer to wait until later.”

### Keep your statements in tune with her responses

**Always shift with new information, clues and signals:**

“That isn't what you want? Let me listen more carefully. I want to be sure I understand exactly what you are trying to say and what you need.”