

The Special Role of the Doula

One role of a maternal caregiver is to provide physical and practical help to the new mother. In addition, the doula often provides the mother subtle emotional and psychological support that can't be easily quantified and is non-formulaic. Like the best teachers, therapists, and parents, the doula optimally is a person with social and emotional intelligence and maturity, empathy, compassion, and warmth; who is personable and self aware, and open to being needed by a person who is in an extremely vulnerable situation.

Whereas the midwife, ob-gyn physician and/or nurse, must focus on facilitating a healthy birth, the doula's main concern is to promote the mother's comfort, well-being, and parental readiness. Nurturing and competent female caregiving has been scientifically shown to offset labor time, level of pain, attachment problems, postpartum depression, and family tension. Continuing studies indicate that rates of birth complications, and a baby's failure to thrive, may also be ameliorated.

Ways the doula provides special support:

- ◆ The doula patiently answers questions as often as needed
- ◆ The doula consistently reassures and comforts mother
- ◆ The doula allows the mother to utterly relax and be "cared for" during this transformative time
- ◆ The doula is a nurturer and protector
- ◆ The doula advocates for the mother's needs with medical and hospital officials
- ◆ The doula is unconditionally accepting and sensitive to changing states of mind and moods
- ◆ The doula is comfortable with the human body and its changes: messiness, awkwardness, fluids, etc.
- ◆ The mother should never feel judged or be seen as inadequate
- ◆ The doula provides a "firewall" against stressful encounters, undue pressure, and distractions
- ◆ The doula must be flexible and responsive to changing needs and circumstances
- ◆ The doula should keep up-to-date on the latest knowledge in her areas of responsibility
- ◆ The doula makes sure that the mother and her partner are adequately informed about all options to help them make critical decisions related to birth and postpartum care