

The Doula's Role

Helping Women Have Positive Birth Experiences

Nurturing support during the sensitive perinatal period activates hormonal changes that enhance parental readiness

A variety of factors can enhance a woman's birth experience

Doulas have acquired many skills from their training and their own experience to help laboring women. 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.

A positive birth experience requires far more than handholding

A birth-giver needs to be secure that the person helping is competent and responsive, is "on top" of everything that is actually happening, and has knowledge about what to do to help. She needs to know that her caregiver won't leave her, will help her through every contraction, will work with her through the pain, will guide her as needed, will help her understand and express her own feelings, fears, needs, worries, convey her wishes to the medical caregivers, will not confront or be in conflict with the other caregivers, but help her express herself, and as appropriate ask respectfully if a particular method might be used before a medical intervention is done.

Obviously nature has enabled us to fall deeply in love with our babies so that we stay with them during their vulnerable years. For millennia, our tribal heritage enabled us to have an extended family to provide many layers of mutual social, emotional, and physical support. But modern society can be alienating, and isolating. Women need people who cherish us to unconditionally tend to us when we experience the overwhelming and transformative experience of giving birth.

With comprehensive psychosocial support, the mother's birth experience can enhance her sense of accomplishment and self-esteem, and promote feelings of being in control, listened to and valued