

What is a Doula?

from Berkshire-Columbia Doulas, www.berkshiredoulas.com

There are two kinds of doulas--labor doulas and postpartum doulas. Sometimes one person offers both kinds of doula service, but often doulas specialize.

A labor doula, or childbirth assistant, is a professional labor support person who has specific training and experience in providing informational, emotional, and physical support during the childbearing year, especially during labor and birth and immediately after.

During pregnancy, visits help the doula get to know the mother and partner and learn what sort of support they are seeking. The doula helps them explore their birthing options, assists them in writing a birth plan, and supports their decisions. She will normally meet with the couple at least twice before the birth.

During labor and birth, doulas provide whatever kind of help is most needed by the mother and partner. The doula joins the laboring mother as soon as the mother wants or needs her company, and stays with the mother for the whole labor, providing the continuous support that is proven to reduce medical interventions and increase satisfaction with the birth. Questions people sometimes ask about continuous support during labor:

Can't the nurse do that? Nurses working in hospitals can rarely provide the kind of continuous personal support that a doula provides because a) they do not have a personal relationship with the family before the birth; b) they have many other responsibilities; and c) they go home when their shift ends.

Can't the mother's partner do that? Partners usually appreciate the help of a doula as much as the birthing mother does. With the help and expertise of the doula, the partner is able to fully focus on the experience of going through labor and birth with the mother.

Does the doula replace the partner? The doula's role is to support the birthing couple, not take over for the woman's partner. Of course, women without partners particularly appreciate the support of a doula. In many ages and cultures, women have helped each other through pregnancy and birth in similar ways.

Berkshire-Columbia Doulas

Serving Berkshire County, Columbia County, and nearby areas

After the birth, the doula stays with the family until the mother, partner, and baby are settled--usually an hour or two. The doula also visits the family once or twice in the weeks after the birth to help the mother and partner process the birth, answer questions, and provide help with breastfeeding and adjusting to life with a newborn. Further support in the weeks after birth can be provided by a postpartum doula.

A postpartum doula provides in-home support to the family in the weeks after the baby's arrival. Many cultures offer new mothers six weeks of special care and rest with their newborns; American culture does not. A postpartum doula can provide some of that care, helping the mother to rest, recover, and bond with her baby. Postpartum doulas offer breastfeeding help, do light housework, prepare meals, run errands, and help new mothers learn to care for their babies and themselves. Often new parents will have many questions about their newborns and their own process of adjustment. The postpartum doula can provide valuable insight that comes from her own experience as a mother and the experience of helping many women through the postpartum period. She can also connect new parents to useful community resources.

For more information, visit our web site at www.berkshiredoulas.com or call one of us:

Sarah (518) 672-4576

Ellen (518) 781-0465

Lisa (413) 496-9727

Cari (518) 672-7332