

Help Your Doula Help You

Support: sup·port (sə-ˈpɔrt, -pɔrt)

tr.v. **sup·port·ed, sup·port·ing, sup·ports**

To bear the weight of, especially from below; To hold in position so as to keep from falling, sinking, or slipping; To be capable of bearing; withstand; To keep from weakening or failing; strengthen; To provide for or maintain, by supplying with money or necessities; To furnish corroborating evidence for; To aid the cause, policy, or interests of, To argue in favor of; advocate; To endure; tolerate; To act in a secondary or subordinate role to (a leading performer). *source: The Free Dictionary*

Synonyms: **uphold, back¹, advocate, champion**

uphold: maintain or affirm in the face of a challenge or strong opposition; **back:** material or moral support intended to contribute to or assure success; **advocate:** verbal support often in the form of pleading or arguing; **champion:** fight for one that is under attack or is unable to act in their own defense *source: The Free Dictionary*

It is natural to want to consider having a woman experienced in labor and birth with you when you are in labor. Women have birthed with women for centuries (midwife) and in many parts of the world including the USA women still bring a female relative or friend with them along with their partner when they go to their birth place or make a conscientious choice to birth at home specifically because they desire the female presence to be primary.

We may have moved further and further away from birth as a normal, organic process but many women continue to find themselves intuitively feeling a need for additional birth support. As birth educators and doulas can attest partner support and participation certainly increases a woman's birth experience. Still some women and their partners readily see a need for another female support presence at their baby's birth. Mothers may sense that a clinical staff can rarely provide thoroughly if at all complete birth support: physical, mental and emotional support. This lack can be attributed to many causes such as the clinical need to distance oneself emotionally in order to best assess and manage the medical case, the requirement to care for multiple laboring women simultaneously and staff who never witnessed or experienced a spontaneous, unmedicated birth over an intact perineum. Just as easily it may feel challenging to both mother and partner to expect her partner to meet all of her needs ~ as she has defined them for herself.

You know yourself better than anyone else you've met or will meet as you near the start of your labor. If there is something that you identify as needing bolstering in your labor now is the time to give serious consideration to addressing the need, especially if you are giving birth in a state that is not supportive of homebirth or midwifery care. Whether you feel a need for support of your choices or physiological support explore having an extra female presence at their birth. Let the doulas you interview know what you are seeking in support from them. This will help them be at ease in opening up to you and share all avenues of support they have experienced in giving and helping you define their role at your birth. Your doula helps you best when you are proactive in learning about natural birth, all of your birth care options and defining the needs and expectations you have of her.

Some articles state doulas are advocates. Some state doulas cannot make decisions for you. Some state doulas provide information as well as physiological support. The truth is that doulas can be one or all of these things but what they are is dependent on the individual mother they are supporting during a given birth. A doula can play different roles for the same woman for different births. The greater the mutual exchange of insight ~ including setting boundaries for your doula ~ the more positive your birth experience will be especially if you find yourself presented with a careprovider trying to limit your support. If you are early in your pregnancy start with a comprehensive, independent natural childbirth class. You will need time to:

- Learn about keeping yourself low-risk and healthy so you can keep all of your options open; options you understand now rather than trying to learn them during labor when you need to focus on birthing your baby not debating.
- Learn about your local birth care options.
- Variations of normal first, second and third stages labor so that you can ...
- Recognize the true medical situation requiring medical intervention.
- How your baby's health is affected by how you labor including,
- Breastfeeding and how you and your baby's breastfeeding relationship is affected by how you labor.
- Understand how your local birth care community affects your birth (you may decide it's your careprovider that's leaving you feeling less than fulfilled!).
- Process the information and make some informed decisions and birth planning including changing from your original careprovider and birth location if necessary.

To be clear, your doula will never make decisions for you but she can be pivotal to your decision-making process if you provide her with all that you have learned independent of her, what your philosophy about birth is and you can voice your choices to your careprovider yourself. Then your doula is not only supporting your labor she's also supporting your choices as witness to your labor and birth. She can provide the physical comfort you've read about AND she can give you the mental and emotional support that comes from sharing her own birth experiences as well as those of women whom she has witnessed labor and birth. These priceless experiences shared intuitively let your birth unfold as YOUR birth.