

# **BIRTHING IN AWARENESS**

## **WHAT IS A DOULA?**

### **A Doula...**

*... recognizes that women have the power to birth and assists the mother in accessing her own "Mother Nature.". A doula also provides emotional support, physical comfort measures, an objective viewpoint and assistance in getting the information that is needed to make empowered decisions throughout pregnancy, birth and postpartum.*

A Doula is a trained person, most often a woman, who has knowledge of the biological processes of labour and childbirth. This knowledge is used to explain to the mother and the partner what is happening around them. She provides psychological encouragement and physical assistance. She also offers emotional support to both the mother and her partner throughout the entire labour and delivery and to some extent, afterwards. This technique is also known as mothering the mother.

## **WHAT DOES DOULA MEAN?**

Doula is a Greek word meaning a "woman caregiver" or a "woman who supports other women". Other terms such as labour coach, monitrice, childbirth companion and labour assistant are also used to define this nurturing woman.

## **WHAT DOES A DOULA DO?**

To understand the role of the Doula we must first distinguish it from other caregivers in the birthing process. She is not a doctor, nurse or midwife and is not involved in any medical decisions.

The Doula is trained in and has an understanding of the usual medical interventions so that she can explain to the parents what is happening around them so that some tension or anxiety may be relieved. She forms a bridge between the medical staff and the parents. She also acts as a buffer to unwanted intrusions.

Having built a relationship with the mother prior to the birth, the Doula knows what the mother and her partner's birth plan is and what goals and wishes the parents have for the birth of their child.

She becomes the mother's voice during the labour, when the mother is unable to express herself and makes sure that her needs and requests along with both parents' wishes are respected.

She provides an environment where the mother may feel secure and supported as the mother is aware that the Doula will remain with her throughout the labour and birth. The mother therefore feels cared for and not alone.

## **DO I NEED A DOULA IF I ALREADY HAVE A DOCTOR OR MIDWIFE?**

In recent times women have begun to rely more and more on medical science and have been birthing in hospitals or clinics. Medical interventions have become almost routine and in some cases even standard procedure.

In the times of our foreparents, women usually gave birth at home with the aid of their mothers, aunts and an experienced woman. The labouring mother was constantly surrounded by other women and was helped through all the various stages of labour through to the birth itself.

Through the process of being hospitalised in order to give birth, women have come to view themselves more and more as patients and have forgotten that they are capable childbearing women.

The Doula is a return to the ways of our foremothers. She is the supporting companion that reassures, encourages and assists in alleviating pain or stress.

Research has conclusively shown that mothers who have continuous labour support in the form of a Doula or other female family member can:

- ❖ Reduce the length of labour,
- ❖ Reduce the likelihood of medication for pain relief,
- ❖ Significantly lower the likelihood of a caesarean section,
- ❖ Lower the likelihood of assisted deliveries,
- ❖ Were less likely to fail to breastfeed,
- ❖ Reduce the possibility of post natal depression
- ❖ And the baby had significantly higher Apgar scores.

The Doula represents a holistic approach to birthing. She may make use of a variety of methods and approaches to assist the birthing process and is always open to suggestions from the parents as to how they wish to proceed.

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