

What is a doula?

Doulas are birth assistants who encourage mothers and fathers to feel more confident and connected during their right of passage into parenthood. They do not replace medical professionals (doctors, midwives, nurses). They work hand-in-hand with the medical birth team to support the needs of the birthing family.

What does a doula do?

A doula can provide a variety of services. She will meet with a family before the birth to help create a birth plan and talk about birth options, discuss nutrition and healthy pregnancy, offer emotional support, and help plan for postpartum support.

During the birth she may use touch, breath work, guidance, help with optimal labor positions, massage and other comfort measures to help ease the work of labor. Studies have shown that the presence of a supportive woman during the birth process is often instrumental in shortening the time of labor, reducing interventions, lessening the need for epidurals, and lowering cesarean rates. Families report higher satisfaction with their birth experience when they had the support of a doula.

Many doulas are also certified in massage therapy, nutrition counseling, aromatherapy (essential oils), herbal consultations, placenta encapsulation, prenatal yoga, breastfeeding support, and more. They may also offer help with household duties and organizing family and community support for the postpartum period. Doulas also connect families with community resources.

Can I have a doula at a hospital birth?

Yes. A doula can help families navigate and understand the medical system, come up with a birth plan before labor begins, and advocate on behalf of the birthing family. Nurses appreciate having doula support because they are often too busy to fully attend to all of a birthing family's needs. The doula provides continuity of care throughout hospital shift changes. The presence of a doula at a hospital birth reduces interventions and increases satisfaction.

Do doulas attend home birth?

Yes. Midwives appreciate having the extra support of a nurturing birth professional during labor. In addition to active labor support, doulas often help with preparing the home, setting up soothing ambiance, meal preparation, setting up a birth pool (and taking it down), sibling care, and post-birth cleanup. They also help with coordinating the birth team and handling logistics throughout pregnancy, birth, and beyond.



How do doulas help partners?

Doulas:

- ◆ Reassure partners that birth is normal.
- ◆ Help partners expand their confidence.
- ◆ Teach partners hands-on techniques to help ease the work of labor.
- ◆ Give partners the opportunity to rest or take a break when needed.
- ◆ Help partners understand medical procedures and interventions.
- ◆ Help take care of older siblings who may be at the birth.
- ◆ Act as a gate keeper to reduce distractions.
- ◆ Communicate with other family members and friends so the birthing parents don't have to. (Send out updates, answer questions, etc.)
- ◆ Help partners understand the needs of a postpartum mother and how to get help when needed.
- ◆ Help new parents learn about newborn care (diapering, bathing, feeding, etc.).
- ◆ Encourage partners to share their perspective of the birth.

How much does it cost & what's included?

On Kauai there are student doulas charging a nominal fee for their services as they complete their certification. There are also experienced, certified doulas who generally charge between \$500-800 for their services. These services generally include prenatal visits, labor and birth support, and postpartum visits. Many doulas offer ala cart services that are separate from the doula fee (massage, yoga, etc.). Usually payment plans can be arranged. This would be a wonderful gift to receive from your family and friends.

How do I find a doula?

You can find resources and more information about the women of **The Seven Sisters Doula Collective** at www.kauaidoulas.com, or contact Barbara Essman: barbaraessmandoula@gmail.com.

Barbara also has the current list of student doulas who charge a nominal fee.

