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## Doula – birth partner

Doula care represents a return to the tradition of woman-to-woman support during pregnancy, labour, birth, and the immediate postpartum period. In Switzerland, all doulas who are members of the Swiss association of doulas 'Doula CH' are mothers themselves.

The basis of doula care is social support, which includes offering information, physical assistance and emotional support. Doulas encourage women to trust their bodies and thus decreasing fear of the labour process. As a whole, the entire family can come through the birth experience physically stronger and emotionally fulfilled.

## The Doula

The doula doesn't replace a midwife or a doctor. She does not perform clinical tasks or make medical decisions for women and their families. She therefore can concentrate fully on the woman/couple. She is well trained and has good knowledge of the various topics around pregnancy and childbirth. She knows and understands the emotional needs of parents-to-be.

## Support before...

The doula child birth support usually starts during the last months of pregnancy. The expecting mother/couple and the doula get to know each other and discuss the upcoming changes in their lives. Open questions, individual needs and ideas regarding the birth process and the first months as parents will be topics at the prenatal meetings. The woman/couple can contact the doula at any time she has/they have a question or a need. Due to the shared preparation, mutual trust is gained which comforts the mother and the father.

## ...during...

Labour support for the **mother** includes emotional support and reassurance, comforting measures and encouraging the woman to change positions and work with her body. Through her observant and alert presence the doula helps to motivate the bearing woman to get emotionally involved with the birthing process and to actively participate in it.

The doula creates enough space for the **father** to experience the birth as a special and unique event. She encourages him to nurture the mother through the birth and supports him at any time. He can concentrate fully on the emotional bond to mother and child. Fathers who have had doula support have expressed their enjoyment at being an active part of the birth experience instead of just being a fearful spectator.

The **child** can feel this sense of security. It is positively affected by the birth, the loving welcome and the first contact with the parents.

## ...and after the birth of your child.

Normally, after the birth two postpartum meetings take place. Generally discussed are the birth experience and open questions regarding the newborn. During the first months, the doula can be contacted as a trusted professional if questions arise. If necessary, she can assist with helpful contacts and addresses.

## Postpartum doula care

As a generalist, a doula can provide extra support during the first weeks or months after birth. Postpartum doulas often: listen to the birth story over and over again; answer the parent's questions; give instructions on how to care for the baby; assist with breastfeeding education; assess for problems with basic skills and make recommendations; prepare meals; run errands - and many more, depending on your individual needs.