



Doula Vitae, LLC
Lucinda Tarr, Owner and Doula
63 Farm Field Lane
Sharon, Vermont 05065
www.doulavitae.com

Doulē, ancient Greek for a woman's servant, has evolved into the modern term doula, now defined by Meriam-Webster as a woman who "is employed to provide guidance and support to a pregnant woman during labor." The role of a birth doula is to provide seamless emotional and physical support through pregnancy and the birth experience. The value of prenatal connection allows a doula to understand, in-depth, the desires and goals of the birth idea as well as gain a deeper knowledge of who they are as people and as a partnership. The trust gained through this connection provides continued comfort, support and remembrance of the birth idea and can allow space for seamless change, if necessary. With the role of a doula being non-medical, it provides a chance to observe clients and encourage them to advocate for themselves when providers are offering information and/or interventions. It is important for a doula to ensure their clients have a clear understanding of everything and are provided the space, in a non-emergent situation, to make decisions they are comfortable with.

During labor, a doula's primary task is recognizing the needs of a birthing person, providing comfort measures and techniques, as well as helping to find deep relaxation and the ability to breath. Taking a moment between contractions to visualize the baby moving downward into the pelvis or giving hip squeezes and counter pressure during a contraction are helpful measures of support and comfort. Often, just a gentle voice of praise or allowing space for a moment to rest can make a tremendous difference. The focus does not remain solely on the birthing person. It is important to be sure that the birth partner's needs are being met and guidance is provided to maintain their engagement in the birth journey. Although, as a team, labor and birth moments and positions are practiced during prenatal visits, a partner can often feel overwhelmed and unsure of the role they are meant to play. Gentle reminders of how and when to provide methods of support can bring strength to the partnership. At times, "tensions arise between a woman and her loved one(s)." During times like this, it is a birth doula's role to maintain continuity, provide a moment for the birth partner to breath but to be sure that they do not disengage from the experience for an extended period of time. To prepare for these potential situations, it is important to discuss this in prenatal visits so there is an understanding about it between the partnership.

Doula care has been beneficial in helping to make tremendous changes in the birthing experience. Continuous support of a birth doula during labor has helped decrease the rate of cesarean birth as well as reduce the use of pain management during the labor process. One study has shown that the continuous support of a birth doula decreases cesarean birth by 39%, (Bohren et al, 2017). Researcher Rebecca Decker of Evidence Based Birth noted that "doulas are a form of pain relief in

themselves.” (Hofmeyr, 1991) Continuous doula support also helps decrease levels of anxiety and discomfort in health care settings. (Ravangard et al, 2017)

According to an article published by the National Library of Medicine, “in the United States, twin pregnancies comprise 3.4% of all live births, and among these, 75% are delivered by cesarean delivery. It is anticipated that by 2030, cesarean sections (CSs) will encompass approximately 29% of all childbirths.” (Abraham, et al 2023)

I am including the information above because I am fortunate enough to have first-hand experience of how the outcome of a twin birth can turn out with a doula’s support.

My client contacted me early in the pregnancy, just after she found out that she was having twins. At thirty-six, already in the high-risk category due to her gestational age, she had the potential of facing many interventions, everything opposite of what she had hoped for. Her biggest concern was advocacy, not only with her own voice, but with a team who would support her wishes to help her birth her twins vaginally. Throughout her pregnancy we communicated regularly and with her permission to speak to her providers, I was able to add a level of support that truly backed what she believed her body could do. Advocacy isn’t always about getting things exactly the way you think they should be, it is also about compromising and finding understanding that will be of benefit to everyone involved. We found that middle ground, together. My client carried her twins until 39 weeks, and birthed her healthy 5+ pound boys, only minutes apart from each other. The journey took some twists and turns but when they reflect on their journey, it is with nothing but joy in their voices and hearts. In her own words, “From our first call, she encouraged me to ask questions, advocate for what I felt would be best, and push the limits of what might be possible within the given parameters. From her skilled, sensitive touch and direction, her knowledge and intuition for effective positioning, to the way she worked seamlessly with the medical team, it was truly an honor and a joy to have Luci with us to be part of something so extraordinary.”

Works Cited:

Bohren, Meghan A et al. "Continuous support for women during childbirth." The Cochrane database of systematic reviews vol. 7,7 CD003766. 6 Jul. 2017, doi:10.1002/14651858.CD003766.pub6

Hofmeyr, G J et al. "Companionship to modify the clinical birth environment: effects on progress and perceptions of labour, and breastfeeding." British journal of obstetrics and gynaecology vol. 98,8 (1991): 756-64. Doi:10.1111/j.1471-0528.1991.tb13479.x

Abraham, Merin et al. "Delivery Method in Twin Gestations: Evaluation Outcomes, Risk Factors, and the Paradigm Shift Towards Elective Cesarean Deliveries" National Library of Medicine; National Center for Biotechnology Information, 2023 Oct; 15(10): e46514. Published online 2023 Oct 5. doi: [10.7759/cureus.46514](https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.46514)

Ravangard, Ramin et al. "Comparison of the Effects of Using Physiological Methods and Accompanying a Doula in Deliveries on Nulliparous Women's Anxiety and Pain: A Case Study in Iran." The health care manager vol. 36,4 (2017): 372-379. doi:10.1097/HCM.000000000000188