

## 3. Bring a Loved One, Friend, or Doula for Continuous Support

Women benefit from good support in labor. Research confirms that the better the support women receive, the easier their labor is and the more satisfied they will be with their birth experience. Feeling safe and cared for allows your brain to produce the hormones that help labor progress, decrease your need for risky interventions, and protect your baby from harm.

Continuous support from a labor companion who trusts the natural birth process and is skilled at meeting the emotional and physical needs of laboring women makes labor easier and safer. This support comes in many forms and helps for many reasons.



*Skillful support people can help you find more comfortable and productive positions for labor.*

### How Continuous Support Helps

- Physical support, such as back massage or help getting into a more comfortable position, can decrease pain and help labor progress.
- Emotional support, such as encouragement, praise, and reassurance, can decrease stress. High levels of stress hormones may slow the progress of labor and increase the amount of pain a woman experiences.
- Informational support, such as explaining to a laboring woman what to expect, providing feedback about her labor progress, or helping her understand

a recommended treatment, can increase a woman's confidence and help her make informed, healthy choices.

### Doulas: Experts in Labor Support

Women often assume that a nurse, midwife, or doctor will stay with them throughout their labor. However, the reality is that other responsibilities usually keep care providers from being with one woman continuously. On the other hand, partners, family members, and friends may offer excellent and continuous emotional support, but they may not know what to expect in labor or how to best assist a laboring woman.

Doulas are professional labor support companions. They generally have received special training in labor support and have attended many births. Most doulas share a philosophy that labor and birth are natural processes, and they strive to support these processes and ease labor for the woman as much as possible.

## RESEARCH insights

Research confirms that labor is safer and healthier when women are supported throughout the process. Research also shows that women who have continuous support from a doula or another trained female companion are less likely to have a cesarean or other interventions.

### Women supported by a doula are less likely to experience the following:

- A cesarean surgery
- A vacuum- or forceps-assisted birth
- The use of pain medication, including narcotics and epidural analgesia
- Negative feelings about their childbirth experience

## Getting Good Support

Many communities or hospitals offer programs that provide doula support to women for little or no cost. However, if you cannot find a doula or you decide not to have one at your birth, you can make the most of the labor support companions who are available to you.

### Make the most of your support team:

- Choose support people who are willing to learn about the birth process, what positions are most helpful, and what choices you may need to make in labor
- Choose people for your labor team who will be actively helping you and not causing you distraction and discomfort
- Ask them to attend birth classes with you
- Practice positions and relaxation techniques with them before you go into labor
- Make sure they understand your birth preferences and will speak up for you



*Partners who learn about labor support techniques are particularly helpful to laboring women.*

## Helpful Birth Environment

Because the birth environment can play such a critical role in your comfort level and the progress of your labor, consider having only a few key skilled support people with you during labor, and wait to invite others in until after the birth of your child. Keeping your room quiet, calm, and private will help you stay focused and comfortable enough to follow your body's natural instincts.



*Doulas work in cooperation with other support people to provide continuous hands-on support.*

## PARTNER tip

### Doulas Also Support Partners

It is common for partners to wonder if a doula will replace their important role at birth. But in fact, a good doula will protect your role and provide you with needed emotional and physical support during the birth of your child.

Research confirms that the benefits of doula care occur even when the woman has her husband or partner present. And in a 2008 study, all of the nearly 200 male partners rated having a doula as either “very positive” (93%) or “positive” (7%). It is important to meet several potential doulas in order to choose one who is a good fit for both you and your partner.



#### Print PDF: Finding a Doula

*Learn how to find the right doula to support you during labor and birth*

[www.mothersadvocate.org](http://www.mothersadvocate.org)



#### Print PDF: Creating Your Support Team

*How to choose and prepare non-professional labor support*

[www.mothersadvocate.org](http://www.mothersadvocate.org)



#### Print PDF: Tips For Labor Support People

*How you can offer support during labor*

[www.mothersadvocate.org](http://www.mothersadvocate.org)