

# Demystifying Doulas

## What are Doulas?

Doulas are trained professionals who play an important role in supporting birthing women and people during pregnancy, birth, and postpartum. Doulas have been supporting childbirth for centuries, yet many people still can't explain what doulas do! This graphic will help demystify what doulas do and clarify their role.\*



## What Doulas do:



**Emotional Support** - Doulas provide continuous emotional support throughout pregnancy, birth, and postpartum. They offer encouragement, reassurance, and a steady, calm presence to their clients, which can help reduce stress and anxiety.

**Physical Support** - Doulas are trained in comfort measures to help with the pain and discomfort of labor. These can include massage, positioning techniques, breathing exercises, and other strategies. They may also provide physical support during delivery.

**Informational Support** - Doulas provide their clients with evidence-based resources to help them make informed decisions. They may help discuss birthing options, explain medical procedures, and help clients create a Birth Preferences document to clarify their wishes for their childbirth experience.



**Advocacy** - Doulas advocate for their clients throughout the birthing process. They help facilitate communication between the client and the medical team, making sure their client's voice is heard and respected. They also empower the client with education and strategies that help them make informed, grounded decisions.

**Postpartum Support** - Doulas may assist in the postpartum period, helping with breastfeeding, newborn care, emotional adjustment, and recovery from childbirth. Doulas can provide both practical assistance and emotional support in the weeks after birth.



## Why Have A Doula?

Research has shown that the one-on-one support of a doula can improve maternal health outcomes.<sup>2</sup>

**SisterWeb's own data shows the importance of Doula Care:**  
(data sourced from Compyle, Fiscal Year 2022-23)

- SisterWeb doulas spent an average of 25 hours supporting clients during labor and birth<sup>1</sup>
- 92% of SisterWeb Clients reported that they walked away from their birth experience feeling proud and dignified<sup>1</sup>
- 95% percent of SisterWeb clients would like to have a doula should they get pregnant again<sup>1</sup>
- 95% percent of SisterWeb Clients report that their SisterWeb Doula helped them feel more confident navigating Healthcare Systems and understanding their rights and options<sup>1</sup>

**Birthing women and people who have a doula:**

- Are less likely to have a cesarean section<sup>2</sup>
- Are less likely to have premature labor and delivery<sup>2</sup>
- Are less likely to have a low-birth-weight baby<sup>2</sup>
- Have reduced anxiety, depression, and postpartum PTSD<sup>2</sup>
- Have improved breastfeeding success<sup>2</sup>



 **SisterWeb**  
San Francisco Community Doula Network

\* Some doulas provide support during childbirth (birth doulas), while others offer resources and culturally congruent care to address inequities and racial disparities in maternal health (community doulas). For the purpose of this infographic we're referring to the experiences of doulas who provide a holistic approach that includes support during pregnancy, birth, and postpartum (full spectrum doulas).

# What's the difference between a Doula and a Midwife?

## Doulas

Educate on breathing, sensory, and coping techniques to assist with pain management in labor.

Provide non-judgemental, whole family support and educate support people/partners on how to best help birthing individual.

Collaborate with medical team and make referrals to a medical provider when necessary.

Help advocate for birth plan, preferences, and coping methods during labor.

Provide reminders for self-efficacy and self-empowerment during pregnancy, birth, and postpartum.

Customize a care plan for birthing families.

Available 24/7 for labor support or guidance.

Provide personalized check-ins via phone, text, or email.

Help with transition into parenthood and can extend help during postpartum recovery/care.



## Midwives

Certified Nurse Midwives (CNM) may provide care in a clinic, hospital, or home setting.

Licensed Midwives (LM) provide care in a birth center or home setting.

Practice client centered care, trauma informed care, and provide Informed Consent.

Can refer to specialist as needed.  
Can provide medical advice.

CNMs can prescribe medication, LMs can administer but not prescribe medications.

Review birth plan and can provide adjustment suggestions based off medical status.

Can provide hands-on assistance and emotional support during birthing process.

Clinically manage care to ensure health/safety of birthing person and newborn.

Provide lactation and infant feeding support, family planning or contraception advice after birth.

Provide postpartum clinical care and support.



### Takeaways:

- Having a doula provides positive, tangible benefits to birthing women and people.
- Being a doula is a viable profession.
- Doulas should be recognized and acknowledged as an important part of the labor team.



Do you or someone you know want a SisterWeb Community Doula? Scan the QR code above.



### References

1. SisterWeb San Francisco Community Doula Network. 2022-2023 Fiscal Year Impact Report. 2023. <https://new.express.adobe.com/webpage/p8oTkj5hHYOaE>
2. Sobczak A, Taylor L, Solomon S, et al. The Effect of Doulas on Maternal and Birth Outcomes: A Scoping Review. Cureus. 2023;15(5):e39451. Published 2023 May 24. doi:10.7759/cureus.39451