



NEW YORK COALITION
FOR DOULA ACCESS

PRINCIPLES OF DOULA SUPPORT IN THE HOSPITAL

“One of the most effective tools to improve labor and delivery outcomes is the continuous presence of support personnel, such as a doula.”

—*Safe Prevention of the Primary Cesarean Delivery*, Consensus Statement, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine, March 2014

A doula is a trained birth specialist who offers various culturally sensitive services, which may include ongoing physical, emotional, spiritual, and informational support to clients and their families before, during, and after childbirth. Doulas help their clients prepare for birth and advocate for their wishes, encourage them to take an active role in their pregnancy journey, and assist them with their transition into parenthood.

Doula-friendliness: Doula-friendly institutions **consistently** demonstrate **support** of the doula’s role in its full scope and **integrate** doulas into the birthing team. Doula friendliness is grounded in policies and practices that reflect an **understanding of the benefits of doula care**, and actively create a space where patients, doulas, and clinicians **collaborate** to ensure the best birth outcomes and experience for the patient.

What doulas do:

- Offer culturally sensitive physical, emotional, informational, and spiritual support as needed to the client and their support person(s).
- Support the client’s choices surrounding the birth, regardless of the doula’s personal views.
- Facilitate positive, respectful, and constructive communication between the client, the support person(s), and the medical team.
- Operate within an integrated support system that includes the client’s family and medical care providers, and facilitates informed, collaborative decision-making.
- Encourage the client to consult medical caregivers on any areas of medical concern.
- May prompt the client to ask questions regarding their care/treatment. However, doulas do not speak for the client.
- Offer help and guidance on comfort measures such as breathing, relaxation, movement, positioning, comforting touch, visualization, and if available, hydrotherapy and use of a birth ball or peanut ball.
- Support and assist with initial breast/chest feeding during the first few hours after birth and provide postpartum support during the hospital stay.
- Adhere to patient confidentiality in accordance with Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) regulations.

What doulas don’t do:

- Diagnose medical conditions, give medical advice, or administer medications.
- Make decisions for the client or project the doula’s own values/goals onto the client.
- Perform clinical tasks such as vaginal exams or assessing fetal heart tones while in the doula role.



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HALLMARKS OF A DOULA-FRIENDLY HOSPITAL

A doula-friendly hospital is one that focuses on:

1. Staff knowledge of doula support

- Actively trains and ensures that staff (including but not limited to registration, triage, ambulatory team, L&D, and security) are knowledgeable about the doula's role in promoting positive maternal and neonatal outcomes, including a positive birth experience*.

2. Doulas as part of the birthing team

- Encourages the clinical team to share regular updates regarding labor progress and potential use of interventions verbally and on the whiteboard; utilize insights from doulas understanding of their client and expertise in birth support, with patients' consent; and provide physical accommodations as needed (such as access to a chair, or a break area if client needs time alone).

3. Increasing awareness of doulas among patients

- Actively and consistently educates patients about the benefits of doula support through all available communication channels (staff-patient encounters, social media, posters, brochures, and videos played in the waiting area) and has an established referral system to connect interested patients with community doula organizations.

4. Doula policy

- Develops, communicates, shares, and implements a clear doula policy that provides guidelines for doulas' access and participation in care, the laboring techniques supported by the hospital, and a bidirectional reporting system (including a formal doula liaison) to help address any emerging issues; facilitates the provision of continuous, calming doula support by allowing doula presence from triage to recovery, absent a compelling medical reason.

High-quality scientific research strongly and consistently supports the benefits of doula care:

- A 2017 Cochrane systematic review analyzed data from 26 studies involving more than 15,000 women and concluded that based on the documented benefits, all women should have access to doula support.
- A review of 41 birth practices in the *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology* in 2008 using the methodology of the US Preventive Task Force concluded that doula support was among the most effective of all those reviewed, one of only three U.S. practices to receive an "A" grade.
- In "Safe Prevention of the Primary Cesarean Delivery," the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) and the Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine (SMFM) reported that continuous labor support is an underutilized strategy for reducing unnecessary C-sections, suggesting the need for policy changes to increase access to doula care, particularly for those at greatest risk of poor outcomes.
- A 2024 review found that doula care was associated with reduced obstetric racism and improved perinatal outcomes, and that similarities between doula and client around culture, life experiences, and immigration status could help reduce the impact of racism and bias on birthing people of color.