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Introduction



Being a birth doula is one of the most complex tasks on the planet. Being successful requires a high degree of emotional intelligence plus self awareness, self control, physical ability, clear psychological boundaries, and professional ethics. Also needed are the ability to communicate effectively and negotiate conflict with clients and careproviders of all kinds. None of these things are skills that can be covered thoroughly in a birth doula training workshop. Doulas need a guide to help figure out how to navigate the medical system and make ethical choices when they're in the midst of a complex problem.

In their workshops, trainers concentrate on passing along child-birth knowledge, physical support skills, and their own hard earned wisdom. They want the emotional guidance given to trainees to stay with them as they continue on their doula journey. This book reinforces the important principles that trainers try to impart in the short time they have with our participants. But it also goes further, showing how you as a doula can truly transform another person's life, changing it for the better.

Doulas are powerful. With our guidance, our clients become more empowered versions of themselves. They are able to grow and become

more like the person they want to be. That's part of being of service to another human being – we're there to assist and to guide after *they* have chosen the destination. In this same way, I hope this book will also help you to become the heart-centered doula that you want to be. While the written voice is mine, the wisdom is culled from over sixty doulas that I formally interviewed and the thousands who I have conversed with in my three decades of doulaing. The research is explained thoroughly in *About The Study*.

I truly believe that we serve best when we observe and get out of our client's way. We lead by following. We show up for them in a way no one else can. We don't leave. We don't have an agenda or preference. Our mantras are "It's not my birth", and "It's not my baby." We maintain an aura of detachment from their choices, but this also comes at a personal cost.

A doula's life is like no other. Our whole goal is to not be in control! We exist in the moment, mindful, in a breath. That's hard work. Being in control, multi-tasking, taking charge – those are all behaviors that get repeatedly rewarded in modern society. Doula work is the antithesis of constant hurrying and seeking control, so we don't get recognized for the supportive, nurturing skills we've been challenged to develop.

Caring skills are often dismissed as something anyone could do because most humans have the capacity to care. But that doesn't mean they develop their brains to really practice the art of caring well for others. We know that repeated practice of a skill causes growth in parts of the brain related to that skill. Based on that, I hypothesize that the brains of experienced birth doulas are different from people who don't practice these same skills. By supporting people at bedside during their births, our amygdalae become highly attuned to their biobehavioral cues, and are repeatedly bathed in oxytocin stimulating environments for hours and days at a time. I'm willing to bet large sums of money that


a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) study of doulas who'd attended over a hundred births would show more highly developed brain structures used to recognize interpersonal cues, interpret the emotional content of other's behaviors, and positively influence social harmony. (To read more, please see Carter, 2017.)

This book addresses a wide range of issues where doulas may need to make decisions. Some of those decisions can be very challenging to make. We find ourselves wondering, "What is the right thing to do? What factors do I need to consider? Whose perspectives might I be missing? If there is a conflict, whose values do I honor?" Sometimes there is no right answer, there's just a choice to be made and you will need to consider multiple points of view. This book offers you those perspectives, expanding around your own individual dilemma so that you can see what other considerations need to be taken into account.

Doulas are often making value-laden decisions. "Do we put the client's needs *always* first or do we need to consider how our actions will reflect on other doulas? Do you honor the intentions laid out in the birth plan or do you respect the choices that are now being made in labor? When a client asks about your births, is that what they really want to know? How do you negotiate working with all the different kinds of nurses, midwives, and physicians that you'll encounter? How do you become a part of a support team when you've never even met your teammates before?"

If the Doula Disappeared... outlines the invisible actions that birth doulas do. We make a huge difference in our clients' birth experiences but rarely get noticed. *Are There Enough Clients For All Of Us?*, *Why It's A Calling*, and *Another Reason Birth Is Sacred* expressed the core beliefs held by many doulas in the study. I found that having these beliefs enabled them to successfully traverse the internal territory of doulaing as well as getting along with their peers.

Why It's A Calling...



Doula work is hard! It is physically challenging, emotionally draining and requires a personal connection that leaves life long impressions. Doulas sacrifice to be there for their clients. They prioritize other people's birth memories above the needs of their own families. They get paid less than what they are worth – often wages are barely above the poverty line. There is a limit to how many clients one can physically and psychically manage. Yet, this work is something that so many of us cannot imagine *not* doing. It fulfills some part of who we are – it expresses our life essence. To help another person through childbirth – as they are physically going through the process of giving life to another human being – is what we feel we are *called* to do.

A calling is often referred to in religious terms because that is our most familiar cultural reference. But a calling means that there is a purpose within us to connect to others and improve their lives. We want to ensure that another person's journey is eased by our presence. What we give is not only a skill or a service, but the essence of our own humanity. Doulas in my study said it was a passion, a priority, without doulaing they would feel that a part of them was missing.

Ten of the sixty doulas in my study described or mentioned the word "calling". Tracy said, "Being a doula is a part of who you are. You can't try to be a doula...you either have it in you or you don't." Nancy shared, "It's my passion and it tests my compassion. In my real life, I'm a banker! But that's a career and this is a passion." Sadie said, "It was in my heart. For so long before I took my workshop I knew it was in my heart and I've never been happier even though it's been so hard."

Doulas: Why You Need To Be Nice First



A doula was complaining on Facebook in response to one of my posts about getting along with nurses. *“Why do I have to be the one to put forth the effort? I wish some nurse would try to get along with me first.”* According to the doulas in my study, here is why it’s up to the professional birth doula:

- You are a guest in her house.
- Making the first move sets the tone for every communication and interaction that follows. Why not use this opportunity to your advantage?
- You only get one chance to make a first impression - and it takes three times as much experience with you to change someone’s mind. Make those first minutes count.
- You are an ambassador for all birth doulas. Your actions reflect on all of us.
- Social skills and emotional intelligence are a significant part of a doula’s success.
- “Hostess” is implied in our job description.
- Hospitals are set up for the mass production of a number of patients moving through the system. When you ask the nurse to change what she usually does to personalize care for your

Powerful Prenatal Relationships



What most doulas want is to guide their clients to have memorable life experiences that contribute to positive parenting. We want our clients to be empowered and treated with respect; to know their options and choose wisely; to feel that our personal sacrifices were worth it for the difference we made in that family's life. Prenatal visits are the vehicle for arriving at that place, but most of us are uncertain how to go about consciously creating a supportive and professional relationship. We know it isn't the same as other healthcare relationships – there's more personal intimacy and less power difference than with medical care providers or mental health counselors.

This guide is based on my research with over forty doulas and thirty parents as well as my own experiences as an expert doula and doula trainer. I'll guide you through the more subtle nuances of building positive and impactful prenatal relationships. The key is to become a trustworthy and safe person. With that as your foundation, you can help another person transform into a better version of themselves simply through the power of your presence. That's the way lasting change happens.

Become A Safe Person

At the beginning of any relationship, trust is mingled with hope and uncertainty. Your client wants to trust you and offers one golden opportunity to prove yourself. If you flub it up, it will take three times the effort to get another one. However, you really don't want your clients to trust you automatically simply because you're their doula. Our