THE VALUE AND PURPOSE OF LABOR SUPPORT

In my twenty plus years of experience as a parent educator, I have come to believe that parenting starts before birth – and that the birth experience itself is one of the best opportunities to help families start out on the right foot. Childbirth signifies the birth of a family, and if we can provide families with a positive, respectful, empowering and memorable experience – we have done a good thing! Being a certified postpartum doula with DONA for almost 7 years, I know first-hand the benefits of support, education, experience, and encouragement that new parents gain from a doula. I believe being a Lamaze Certified Childbirth Educator and a nationally Certified H.U.G. Program Teach are the perfect complement to being a birth doula.

Benefits of labor support to the mother and her family:
A lot of research has been done about the benefits of labor support provided by a doula for the mother and the family. Some examples of these benefits include labor being 25% shorter; 50% less risk of undergoing a Cesarean section; a 60% reduction in an epidural being requested; 30% less usage of any pain reducing medication; and 40% decrease in receiving Pitocin or having a forceps assisted delivery. (Mothering the Mother, by Klaus, Kennel & Klaus, 1993). Other research has shown that at six weeks postpartum women who had a birth doula are 22% more likely to breastfeed exclusively; are 47% less likely to have breastfeeding problems; have significantly less anxiety and depression and higher self-esteem; and have significantly higher perceptions of their baby and of themselves as mothers (The Doula Book by Klaus, Kennel & Klaus, 2002).

Purpose behind providing labor support
Women have been helping women have babies since the beginning of time. It is human nature – and necessary. In our culture today, we have lost some of our history, but the birth doula is helping bring back the important support that women need during childbirth. The research listed above shows us the positive outcomes that a birth doula provides – and it is the right thing to do!

Doula’s responsibilities
According to the Code of Ethics for Birth Doulas – a doula must behave in a professional and ethical manner at all times during her work with clients as well as the community. Being respectful, caring, professional, reliable, recognizing the importance of confidentiality, being fair in fees charged, working as a partner with other childbirth professionals, and doing community service as appropriate are important skills and behaviors for doulas to embody.

Birth Doula’s role
The professional role of the doula is to provide physical, emotional, and informational support on a continuous basis to the mother and her family during the birth process. A doula is the support person whose main focus is the laboring mother – the doula is there to do whatever is needed by the mother to help her have a positive and safe birth experience. A doula represents an important role – that of being a “strong role model and support person” for women while they are doing some of the most important work they will ever do – birthing a baby!