

# Should You Hire a Postpartum Doula?

A postpartum doula explains how she helps new parents navigate their transition into parenthood so you can decide if hiring one could be right for you. Learn about postpartum doula services, training, and how to find one in your area.

By **Pam Skop**

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I have always loved little babies. The smell of them, the feel of their warmth as they snuggle up against you, the way that they can just drift off to sleep no matter what is happening around them as long as they feel calm and safe. In college, graduate school, and during career transitional periods, I nannied for many children, most of whom were between the ages of 4 weeks and 3 months when I started caring for them. I noticed that as a nanny for new moms, I was not only there to take care of the children but I also gave emotional support to the mom. Parents relied on me to

help them make the transition into parenthood, which sometimes included navigating the complexity of going back to work after having a baby.

When my own sisters gave birth over the past few years, I again found myself at the forefront of helping new parents make this big life transition, but it felt much more personal than ever before. Through educating myself as a nanny and new aunt, I learned of the work that postpartum doulas do and decided that I may want to become one. I researched the training and what it entailed but due to time and money put off this goal while I pursued graduate school in mental health counseling and worked to get my license. In March of 2019, I decided it was the right time to become a postpartum doula and am currently in the process of completing my certification.

During this process, I've become very passionate about this work and I am excited to share what I have learned in the hopes that it can help new moms, moms-to-be, or be passed along to a friend or family member who could benefit from a postpartum doula.

## What is a Postpartum Doula?

If the concept of a postpartum doula is foreign to you, you are not alone. It is only recently that people are beginning to talk about postpartum doulas and the work that we do. The term doula comes from a Greek word, meaning one who serves. From a historical perspective, the term doula was used to refer to a lay support person who attended to friends and family members in labor. Today, many people work as birth doulas by assisting clients during their birth and labor. Some people may be both birth and postpartum doulas.

Postpartum doulas are individuals trained in assisting families in the postpartum period, generally the three months after birth (known as the fourth trimester). Our job is to integrate this new little person into the family and help the family find a way of balancing itself with an additional member. We provide support, not only to the person who gave birth but to partners, siblings, and other family members. This period of time can come with many unexpected challenges and having someone around to provide support and guidance can be especially useful.

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The concept of a postpartum doula is not new. Even as recently as the past century, it was typical for families to live near each other and be there to provide hands-on support when a new baby came. They played the role of the doula. When family is not around, a professional postpartum doula steps in to fill this void.

## Postpartum Doula Cost and Services

The work of a postpartum doula can be broken down into three categories as defined by [DONA International](#): practical, informational, and emotional. The practical work includes things like helping the family meal prep and get one-handed snacks ready for nighttime feedings. It can entail light house cleaning and spending time with a sibling so the baby and parents can nap. Another important piece of this is also discussing with the family what things will look like once the postpartum doula is no longer there (who will cook, grocery shop, etc). The idea is for the family to feel empowered once that postpartum doula leaves.

In regards to information, postpartum doulas are knowledgeable about newborn and infant care. We provide information on diaper changes, feeding including light breastfeeding support, bathing, and other needs your baby may have. We also provide resources as needed. For instance, if a mother is experiencing mental health concerns, a postpartum doula will provide them with a list of local referrals who work counsel on postpartum mood and anxiety disorders.

The emotional support of a doula includes allowing the person who gave birth time to tell their birth story, sitting with them when they feel overwhelmed and need to talk to someone, and knowing when to provide additional resources for support as needed.

According to information on DONA International's website, [the cost of a postpartum doula](#) can vary state by state and depend on their certification and experience level. A certified postpartum doula typically charges between \$30 to \$45 per hour.

## Postpartum Doula Vs. Baby Nurse

It's important to note that a postpartum doula is not a nanny, babysitter, or a baby nurse (sometimes called a night nurse). While a baby nurse is a childcare professional who helps parents get a good night's sleep while assisting with childcare needs through the night, the role of a postpartum doula is to help parents figure out how to balance their life with this new addition. Whereas a baby nurse will take over childcare, a postpartum doula is there to give information so that parents can care for their babies with support and the proper instruction. While some postpartum doulas will do overnight shifts with families similarly to how a baby nurse works, there is an emphasis on teaching parents how to manage on the nights the doula is not there and after the doula is no longer working for the family.

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Most commonly, postpartum doulas work daytime or evening shifts of about four to five hours. The doula's shifts depend on the needs of the family and the schedule of the doula. Some families like to have support five days a week in the beginning and then decrease it as they get more into a rhythm. Other families may find it helpful to have the postpartum doula come two or three days per week as an additional support. A doula typically works with a family within the three months following birth, however, this timeframe again is very individual to the family and their needs. Some new parents may want a postpartum doula during that whole three-month period while others may find it helpful to have them for just a week or two.

## Postpartum Doula Training

Though there are several certifying organizations, I trained through [DONA International](#). This training is a three-day intensive program where participants learn about everything related to newborn and infant care, breastfeeding, bottle feeding, family dynamics, and both physical and mental health warning signs. Once the weekend training is over, doulas can start working with families and will need to work with three families and earn recommendation letters before they are certified.

For the certification process, doulas are provided with a list of books they need to read covering many of the topics, such as family bonding and attachment and newborn and infant care and development, that the intensive training covered in

more depth. A breastfeeding course is also required to work toward certification. Postpartum doulas must also create an extensive local resource list so they are ready to inform their clients with resources when different needs come up.

## Who Should Hire a Postpartum Doula?

It is my belief that anyone who has recently welcomed a new baby into their family can benefit from the support a postpartum doula can offer. The addition of a new person to your life and your home can be a major time of transition. It's a period of routine being broken down and a new routine starting to emerge. For those who are not prepared, it can be especially daunting. Even if you think you are prepared, the changes can feel much more powerful than could be imagined. It can be very helpful to have someone in your home who is there to guide you through this transition.

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I often hear people say they don't need a doula because their partner will be home with them for a period of time or another family member may be coming to stay. While this can be an amazing part of the transition, a doula can be especially helpful in that time. Though family members often mean well, they can sometimes add stress to what can already be a stressful period. Having someone there who is around to provide support and evidence-based intervention, rather than opinion, allows parents to make their own decisions regarding their children. A postpartum doula can be helpful in mediating some of the family dynamics that can come up.

## Finding a Postpartum Doula Near You

It is normal for the postpartum period to be one of chaos that is filled with doubts that coincide with the joy and love parents feel for a new baby. The job of a postpartum doula is to be there to make this transition smoother so that parents can focus on getting to know the new person in their life. If you believe you may be interested in finding a postpartum doula, a great resource is [Doula Match](#) or searching for doulas or doula services in your area.

*Pam Skop is a licensed mental health counselor, registered yoga teacher, and postpartum doula who is receiving her certification through DONA International. Learn more about her work at [PamSkopWellness.com](https://PamSkopWellness.com).*

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