

Clinician Guide for Collaborating with Doulas



Doula Overview

What Doulas Do and
Dont Do

Voices From the Field

Doula Support: An
Evidence Based Practice

Common Misconceptions

Using TeamBirth Principles
to Integrate Doulas

Doula Integration:
Signs of Success

Tips for Collaborating
with Doulas

Doula Readiness Checklist

Additional Resources

Overview

Doulas provide continuous physical, emotional, and informational support before, during, and after childbirth, improving both birth experiences and outcomes. Yet their role is often misunderstood, and collaboration with clinical teams remains inconsistent, limiting the impact doulas can have.

This Guide is designed to educate clinicians on the doula role, provide evidence and strategies for doula support and effective collaboration in both TeamBirth and non-TeamBirth settings.



TIP: Ask doulas about their scope! For example, “Do you primarily support clients during labor, postpartum, or across the full spectrum?

Did you know that...

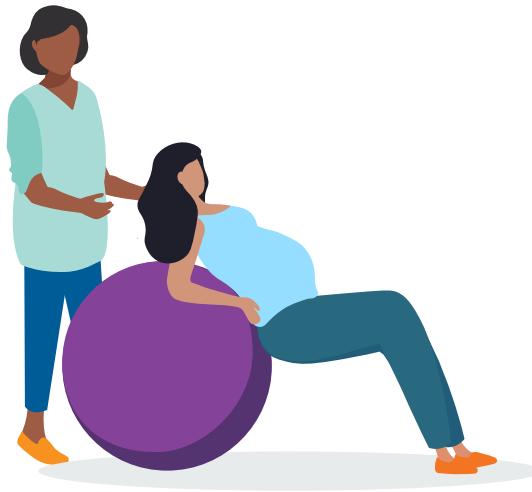
Doulas are trained, non-medical professionals; however, there is currently no national licensure or regulatory body for doulas. Many pursue certification through training organizations.

Doulas may work as private contractors, hospital-based staff, volunteers, or members of community-based organizations.

Payment models vary widely, including out-of-pocket payments from clients, grant-supported care, employer or hospital-based pay, and Medicaid reimbursement in some states.

[Doula Overview](#)**[What Doulas Do and
Dont Do](#)**[Voices From the Field](#)[Doula Support: An
Evidence Based Practice](#)[Common Misconceptions](#)[Using TeamBirth Principles
to Integrate Doulas](#)[Doula Integration:
Signs of Success](#)[Tips for Collaborating
with Doulas](#)[Doula Readiness Checklist](#)[Additional Resources](#)

What Doulas Do



- ✓ Support birth and postpartum planning
- ✓ Advocate for the patient
- ✓ Support with physical comfort measures during labor (e.g. position changes)
- ✓ Facilitate communication between patient, their support people, and care team
- ✓ Provide psychological safety and help bridge communication and language gaps
- ✓ Connect families to services such as lactation support, mental health care, or social services

What Doulas Don't Do



- ✗ Make medical decisions or speak on behalf of the patient
- ✗ Perform clinical exams or procedures
- ✗ Provide diagnoses or medical advice
- ✗ Prescribe treatments or medications
- ✗ Replace clinical care or mental health services

[Doula Overview](#)[What Doulas Do and Don't Do](#)[Voices From the Field](#)[Doula Support: An Evidence Based Practice](#)[Common Misconceptions](#)[Using TeamBirth Principles to Integrate Doulas](#)[Doula Integration: Signs of Success](#)[Tips for Collaborating with Doulas](#)[Doula Readiness Checklist](#)[Additional Resources](#)

Voices from the Field: What Doulas Want Clinicians to Know



I am here to amplify the patient's voice, preferences, and values.

“*This is where doulas shine—they work on the birth plan, understanding what the patient is afraid of, their big goals, and their values.”*

RILEY—(Community-based doula; 8 years experience; specializes in full continuum from pre-conception through postpartum)

My role complements yours, we're on the same team.

“*It's about everyone leaning into their strengths... Doulas don't make medical decisions, but we help patients understand what's happening, process their fears, and feel centered.”*

JORDAN—(Volunteer hospital doula; 2 years experience; Supports clients during labor & inpatient postpartum)

Mutual respect creates a safer, more inclusive space for the patient.

“*Experiences where providers used my name and put me on the whiteboard and made sure I was included in questions in that moment...it really changes things when there is a united front.”*

MARIA—(Hospital-employed doula; 10 years experience; specializes in NICU support)

Acknowledging me helps patients feel seen and supported too.

“*I have stories of providers never looking at me, not speaking to me, not making eye contact and it becomes palpable that I can feel it and patients can feel it too.”*

LENA—(Self-employed birth doula; 5 years experience; supports clients prenatally, during labor, and postpartum)

[Doula Overview](#)[What Doulas Do and Don't Do](#)[Voices From the Field](#)[Doula Support: An Evidence Based Practice](#)[Common Misconceptions](#)[Using TeamBirth Principles to Integrate Doulas](#)[Doula Integration: Signs of Success](#)[Tips for Collaborating with Doulas](#)[Doula Readiness Checklist](#)[Additional Resources](#)

To view sources for each practice, click on the icon. Or visit the page at this link:



Doula Support: An Evidence-Based Practice



Shorter labor duration



Higher breastfeeding initiation rates



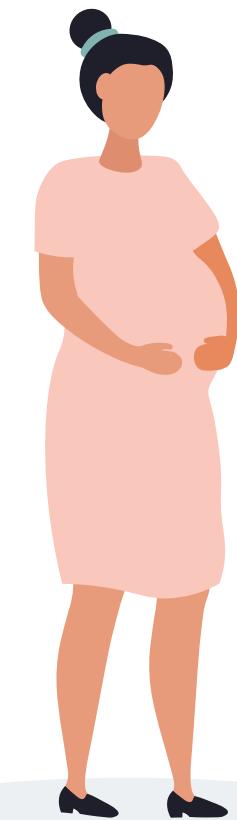
47% lower risk of cesarean birth



Lower pharmacologic pain use



29% lower risk of preterm birth



57% lower likelihood of postpartum depression/anxiety



Lower average cost of care



Reduction of clinician workload



Higher neonatal APGAR scores



Higher patient satisfaction scores

Scan QR on last page of this guide for references

[Doula Overview](#)[What Doulas Do and
Dont Do](#)[Voices From the Field](#)[Doula Support: An
Evidence Based Practice](#)**Common Misconceptions**[Using TeamBirth Principles
to Integrate Doulas](#)[Doula Integration:
Signs of Success](#)[Tips for Collaborating
with Doulas](#)[Doula Readiness Checklist](#)[Additional Resources](#)

Common Doula Misconceptions— Debunked

✖ **Doulas interfere with the role of nurses or doctors**

FACT:

Doulas aim to collaborate with the care team to support patient goals. Evidence shows that positive relationships between doulas and clinicians enhance outcomes and patient satisfaction.

**CLINICIAN
TIP:**

CLINICIAN TIP: Ask doulas to share how long they have been working with their client and how they can best partner with them.

✖ **Doulas only support patients during labor**

FACT:

Doulas may offer a full spectrum of services before, during, and after labor. Some of these services include but are not limited to prenatal and postpartum support.

**CLINICIAN
TIP:**

If your patient has a doula, ask how they've been working together to strengthen continuity of care and support shared goals. Invite the doula to participate in prenatal care visits, if possible.

✖ **Doulas are only for unmedicated births**

FACT:

Doulas support all birth choices - medicated, unmedicated, planned cesareans, and more. Their role is to inform and support their patient's choice.

**CLINICIAN
TIP:**

Doulas can help patients feel more confident and informed, no matter the birth approach. Their presence is about supporting autonomy.

[Doula Overview](#)[What Doulas Do and Don't Do](#)[Voices From the Field](#)[Doula Support: An Evidence Based Practice](#)**Common Misconceptions**[Using TeamBirth Principles to Integrate Doulas](#)[Doula Integration: Signs of Success](#)[Tips for Collaborating with Doulas](#)[Doula Readiness Checklist](#)[Additional Resources](#)

Common Doula Misconceptions—Debunked

✖ Doulas replace their client's voice

FACT:

Doulas do not replace the patient's voice—they help amplify it. They support understanding and direct communication with the care team. When a patient's voice is overlooked—due to stress, bias, or systemic barriers—a doula may respectfully restate or clarify their preferences to ensure care aligns with the patient's values and consent.

CLINICIAN TIP:

Ask doulas to share how long they have been working with their client and how they can best partner with them.

✖ Only some patients need doulas

FACT:

People of all backgrounds, cultures, and risk levels choose doulas. Research shows doulas are especially impactful for patients who experience systemic barriers.

CLINICIAN TIP:

Offer information about doula support to all patients. Doulas can be a key support for informed decision-making and improved outcomes across populations.

✖ Doulas provide medical care and advice

FACT:

Doulas provide non-clinical support: emotional, physical, and informational. They do not perform medical tasks or give clinical advice. Their role complements, not disrupts, clinical care.

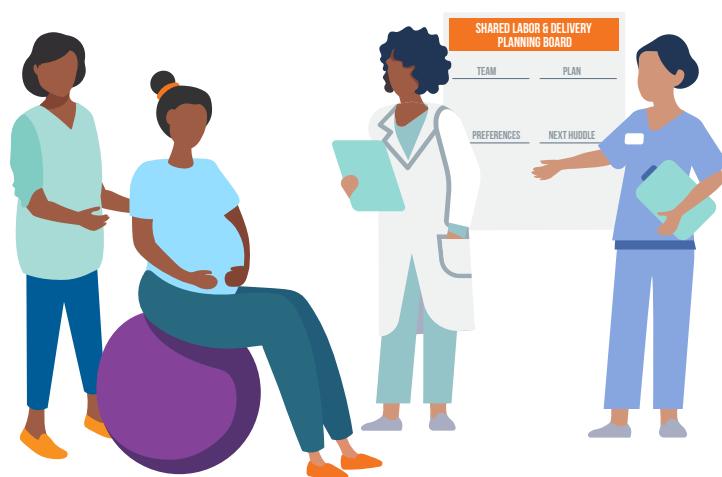
CLINICIAN TIP:

Introduce yourself early and share how you work. A quick check-in can build mutual respect and improve teamwork at the bedside. and improve teamwork at the bedside.

[Doula Overview](#)[What Doulas Do and
Dont Do](#)[Voices From the Field](#)[Doula Support: An
Evidence Based Practice](#)[Common Misconceptions](#)[Using TeamBirth Principles
to Integrate Doulas](#)[Doula Integration:
Signs of Success](#)[Tips for Collaborating
with Doulas](#)[Doula Readiness Checklist](#)[Additional Resources](#)

Using TeamBirth Principles to Integrate Doulas

TeamBirth is a patient-centered care model designed to strengthen communication, teamwork, and shared decision-making during labor and birth. The model includes **structured bedside huddles** with the full care team—including the patient, support person(s), and doula—to openly discuss and document team member roles, patient preferences, care plans, and next steps on a **visible shared planning board**.



Within TeamBirth, doulas serve as important advocates for patient voice and preferences, helping to build shared understanding and alignment across the care team. See the Doula Integration: Signs of Success visual on the next page for examples of how doulas can be meaningfully incorporated into TeamBirth.



I have worked with many different doulas in my career and have seen firsthand how they can change the environment in the labor room and postpartum to positively impact the patient experience and clinical outcomes.”

— CERTIFIED NURSE MIDWIFE IN TN & TEAMBIRTH PROVIDER CHAMPION

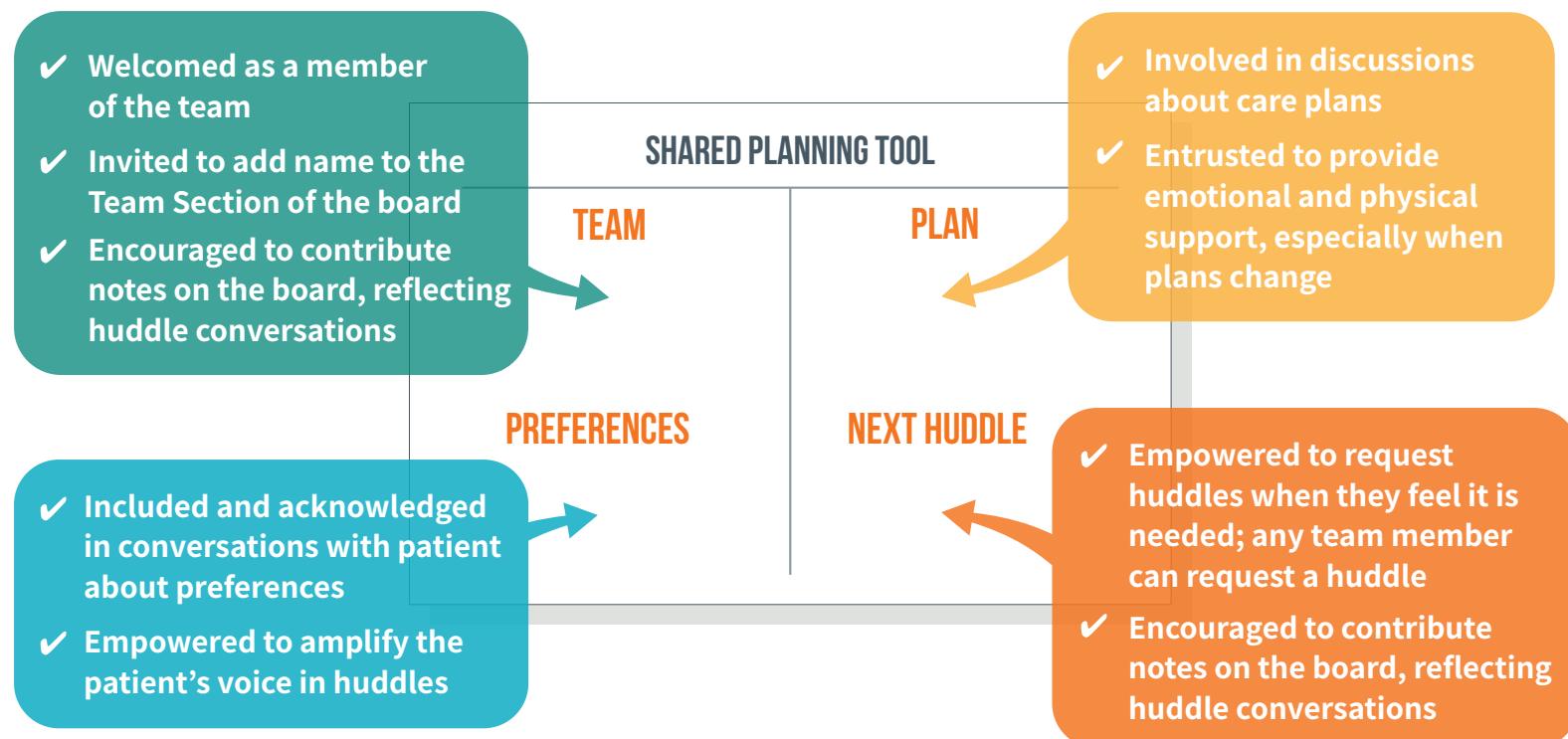
Even in hospitals that have not yet implemented TeamBirth, its core principles can guide more effective collaboration with doulas:

- **Collaborative communication:** Key decisions are made during structured, inclusive conversations where all voices—including the patient’s and doula’s—are invited and heard. Huddles can help promote trust and psychological safety.
- **Shared planning:** Team member names, patient preferences, care plans, and next steps are documented in a way that is visible to everyone, supporting transparency, equity, and shared decision-making.

[Doula Overview](#)[What Doulas Do and
Dont Do](#)[Voices From the Field](#)[Doula Support: An
Evidence Based Practice](#)[Common Misconceptions](#)[Using TeamBirth Principles
to Integrate Doulas](#)[Doula Integration:
Signs of Success](#)[Tips for Collaborating
with Doulas](#)[Doula Readiness Checklist](#)[Additional Resources](#)

TeamBirth Doula Collaboration: Signs of Success

A doula providing support at a TeamBirth birthing facility should be:



[Doula Overview](#)[What Doulas Do and Don't Do](#)[Voices From the Field](#)[Doula Support: An Evidence Based Practice](#)[Common Misconceptions](#)[Using TeamBirth Principles to Integrate Doulas](#)[Doula Integration: Signs of Success](#)[Tips for Collaborating with Doulas](#)[Doula Readiness Checklist](#)[Additional Resources](#)

Tips for Collaborating with Doulas

Set expectations early

- ✓ Clarify each team member's role and communication norms upon admission or early labor.
Have the doula write their name and role on the whiteboard, as applicable.

Lead with shared goals

- ✓ Use collaborative language: "We both want the patient to have the best experience possible."

Use respectful, inclusive language

- ✓ Examples: "Let's discuss options together" or "Let's make sure the patient feels informed."

Include doulas in team communication

- ✓ Invite doulas to huddle conversations or updates to ensure the team is aligned.

Re-center the patient if tension arises

- ✓ If a doula speaks for the patient in a way that you're not sure reflects their wishes, invite the patient to speak directly. For example, "Thanks for sharing that, [doula name], I appreciate your input. [Patient name], I would love to hear from you- how do you feel about __." Consider calling a huddle or using the whiteboard to realign the team.

Speak with the doula privately when needed

- ✓ Brief conversations outside the patient room can help clarify misunderstandings or uncover sources of concern if there is tension or disagreement in the room that cannot be resolved respectfully in front of the patient.

Gather feedback

- ✓ Use an anonymous survey or form to gather both positive and constructive feedback from both hospital staff and doulas on their experiences working together on the unit.

Identify a point of contact

- ✓ A point of contact or doula liaison at the hospital can help answer questions and support sharing feedback and following up on any reported concerns with both clinical team members and doula partners.

[Doula Overview](#)[What Doulas Do and
Dont Do](#)[Voices From the Field](#)[Doula Support: An
Evidence Based Practice](#)[Common Misconceptions](#)[Using TeamBirth Principles
to Integrate Doulas](#)[Doula Integration:
Signs of Success](#)[Tips for Collaborating
with Doulas](#)[Doula Readiness Checklist](#)[Additional Resources](#)

Doula Collaboration Checklist

This checklist is designed to help both TeamBirth and non-TeamBirth facilities assess doula readiness and plan for integrating doulas as part of the care team.

Core Clinical Team Practices

These **core practices** are essential to support doula collaboration:

- Clinical team understands a doula's scope of practice and role in care (review this guide)
- Clinical team recognizes doulas as part of the care team
 - Clinical team invites doulas into bedside huddles when present
 - Clinical team encourages doulas to engage in care planning conversations (e.g., writing on whiteboard), as appropriate

Additional Strategies

These **additional strategies** can further strengthen collaboration and doula engagement:

Training and education

- Ensure doulas have access to available onboarding and training materials
 - (*For TeamBirth facilities, see [TeamBirth Doula Training package](#))
- Include doulas in simulation trainings and safety or orientation protocol

Hospital policies

- Include doulas as non-visitors in support person policy
- Clearly define check-in procedures for doulas & provide a badge or sticker that identifies their role
- Review OR policy to determine appropriate role for doulas

Doula engagement & feedback

- Encourage doulas to attend prenatal appointments and maternity tours to meet clinical team members
- Consider hosting a local doula meet and greet event
- Collaborate with doulas to provide information for prospective parents interested in doula services
- Identify a liaison and/or mechanism for doulas and clinical team members to share feedback

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Evidence Based Practice

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Using TeamBirth Principles
to Integrate Doulas

Doula Integration:
Signs of Success

Tips for Collaborating
with Doulas

Doula Readiness Checklist

Additional Resources



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