

“Many women may experience trauma in childbirth, whether or not they have experienced domestic violence or sexual assault.”

## What is a Doula?

A childbirth assistant or labor coach that helps guide the childbirth experience for laboring women through education, emotional support, comfort measures, position changes, coaching and advocacy.

## What is an Advocate?

A trained professional that supports victims of crimes, such as domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and other forms of abuse, who offer information, emotional support, and help finding resources and filling out paperwork for victims to pursue legal action against their abusers.

## Resources

### Applied Research Paper

Violence During Pregnancy and the Postpartum Period - [http://vawnet.org/Assoc\\_Files\\_VAWnet/AR\\_DVpregnancyPostpartum.pdf](http://vawnet.org/Assoc_Files_VAWnet/AR_DVpregnancyPostpartum.pdf)

### TA Question of the Month

How can I support pregnant survivors of abuse? <http://www.vawnet.org/news/2014/07/pregnant-survivors/>

### Technical Assistance Guidance

Birth Doulas and Shelter Advocates: Creating Partnerships and Building Capacity - [http://www.vawnet.org/Assoc\\_Files\\_VAWnet/FINAL-April2014-DV-DOULAS.pdf](http://www.vawnet.org/Assoc_Files_VAWnet/FINAL-April2014-DV-DOULAS.pdf)

### Books

When Survivors Give Birth: Understanding and Healing the Effects of Early Sexual Abuse in Childbearing Women by Penny Simkin and Phyllis Klaus - <https://www.pennysimkin.com/shop/when-survivors-give-birth/>

Survivor Moms: Women's Stories of Birthing, Mickey Sperlich and Julia Seng - <http://www.midwiferytoday.com/books/survivormoms.asp>

The **National Resource Center on Domestic Violence** ([nrcdv.org](http://nrcdv.org)) provides a wide range of free, comprehensive, and individualized technical assistance, training, and specialized resource materials. For more information call (800) 537-2238, email [nrcdvta@nrcdv.org](mailto:nrcdvta@nrcdv.org) or visit online at [nrcdv.org/contact-us](http://nrcdv.org/contact-us).



**National Resource Center**  
on Domestic Violence

# Trauma-Informed Birth Support

Survivor + Doula + Advocate



# About Pregnancy, Childbirth & Trauma

Childbirth is a natural, biological process that is experienced differently by every woman, and even women with multiple births will have a different experience each time.

While planning for the birth of a child and managing lifestyle changes due to the pregnancy, women and their partners must make a variety of different choices. Some of the factors that inform those decisions include, but are not limited to:

- Personal values
- Faith and spiritual beliefs
- Cultural practices
- Individual upbringing
- Access to medical care
- Economic status
- Family and community support

With trauma-informed and tailored planning and support, birth can be a beautiful and empowering experience for survivors of domestic violence. It may also offer a turning point in time for many survivors to explore the possibilities in their new beginning

**Health and well-being concerns and survival needs may be intensified if pregnant women are also dealing with past or current domestic violence, abuse and related trauma.**

## What do victim advocates and birth doulas have in common?

### Care

Both care are about, advocate for, and support the emotional and physical safety and wellbeing of women.

### Have Long-Term Impacts

Both are in women's lives for a short period of time but with long-term impacts and consequences.

### Meet Unique Needs

Both come in contact with women experiencing unique needs related to power, vulnerability, and personal decision-making that are politically charged.

### Make Connections

Both connect women to specialized services in their community.

## What can victim advocates do to support expectant women that come in for services?

**Support** the expectant woman's efforts to be an agent in her own birth through education, empowerment and thoughtful planning (IN ADVANCE).

**Listen** to and validate the expectant women's concerns and needs.

**Conduct** safety planning and explore child custody matters.

**Assist** survivors in accessing prenatal and postpartum care.

**Help** mothers obtain needed maternity and baby care supplies.

**Share** and promote positive birth stories.

**Support** mothers individual choices in parenting their children.

## How can doulas support expectant women that may have a trauma history?

**Help** the expectant woman be an agent in her own birth through education, empowerment and thoughtful planning (IN ADVANCE).

**Listen** to and validate the laboring woman's concerns and needs.

**Assist** the expectant woman in preparing and discussing her trauma-related needs with her medical team to develop a plan, if requested.

**Respect** her physical space and change the environment as requested.

**Help** the laboring woman become centered within her body and listen to her baby. If helpful, repeat empowering, affirming mantras.

**Suggest** that another loved one be with her at the birth for additional support if the partner can't or won't be there.

**Ask** for monitors to be removed, suggest different positions, change comfort measures, and use positive birth stories.