

A Doula's Fees

Many people ask about the breakdown of professional labor support fees. I offer this information so that you'll have a better idea of what your money is paying for.

HOURS

Most first labors last longer than 18 hours; some can last as long as 40 or more. The average time I spend with a woman for her labor and birth is about 12 hours, although I used to spend even more before I started providing birth hypnosis to all of my clients. I spend at least another 6 hours in prenatal meetings and more if the client chooses to have the postpartum meetings. Phone calls, individual research and responding to e-mails often adds another hour or two per client.

CLIENTS

When I make a commitment to be available to attend you in labor, I limit the number of clients I put on my calendar to avoid birth conflicts and to ensure that I am reasonably rested when you go into labor. I try to schedule four clients per month. When I put your due date on my calendar, I commit to being available two weeks beforehand and two weeks after that date. This means that when I schedule a two-week vacation, I have to add another four weeks during which I cannot accept clients.

SELF-EMPLOYMENT FACTOR

The rule of thumb is that a self-employed professional's income is only half of what they earn, after deductions for vacation and sick time, self-employment taxes, health insurance, and business expenses. Communication expenses are high for a doula -- I have a toll free number so you can reach me in any situation, two cell phones with different carriers so I'm always reachable, a web site, and a computer with a high-speed Internet connection. I also have routine professional and office expenses and unusual transportation and supplies expenses. In addition, there are supplies I bring with me to your birth and give you at appointments and interviews.

TRAINING AND EXPERIENCE

It's important to me to keep up with all of the most current information. In order to attend conferences and training opportunities, I often have to limit the number of clients I can accept around the time I will be unavailable, thereby reducing the number of clients I can work with each year.

INTANGIBLES

Being on-call all the time requires a very high level of personal sacrifice, including a willingness to be awakened after half an hour of sleep to go attend a labor for the next 40 hours. Personal family events are frequently missed or interrupted for births. When I go to a movie with a friend, we have to take two cars, in case I have to leave suddenly for a birth. I can attend a party, but I'll have to forgo that glass of wine and I have to bring a change of clothes with me wherever I go. When my grandchildren are in town, I can't take care of them unless I have another responsible adult prepared to take over at a moment's notice. I cannot take weekend trips away from Los Angeles, and even local appointments have to be planned around traffic conditions so that I'm never too far away when a client calls in labor.