

# Scope of Practice

## *Doulas Support and Paid for by the Family*

## *Birth Assistants Support and Paid for by the Midwife*

The scope of practice of a birth assistant refers to the specific roles, duties, and responsibilities of the assistant during labor, delivery, and postpartum care. Birth assistants are typically trained professionals, such as midwifery assistants or doulas, who support the midwife or other primary birthing care providers. They help ensure that the birth process goes smoothly by assisting with non-medical tasks and providing support to both the birthing person and the healthcare team. While their scope of practice may vary depending on certification, location, and experience, here is a comprehensive breakdown of the general scope of practice for a birth assistant:

### 1. Pre-Birth Preparation

- **Setting up the Birth Environment:** Ensuring that the birth room is clean, organized, and properly equipped for the birth, including setting up necessary equipment like birth supplies, linens, and comfort items.
- **Preparing Equipment:** Assisting in setting up medical supplies needed for the birth, including sterile instruments, birthing kits, and monitoring equipment, while ensuring everything is ready and accessible.
- **Client Support and Communication:** Assisting with client intake, reviewing birth plans, answering questions, and supporting the client's comfort and emotional state leading up to labor.



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## 2. Support During Labor

- **Physical Assistance:** Helping to position the birthing person for comfort and optimal labor progression (e.g., assisting with mobility, helping with the use of a birthing ball, or assisting with different labor positions).
- **Comfort Measures:** Supporting pain management through non-medical methods, such as massage, offering hydration, cold or warm compresses, and positioning techniques.
- **Emotional Support:** Providing emotional reassurance, encouragement, and comfort to the birthing person, helping them to stay calm and confident throughout labor.
- **Monitoring Vital Signs:** Assisting with monitoring the birthing person's vital signs, such as temperature, pulse, and blood pressure, when trained and as appropriate.
- **Assisting with Documentation:** Keeping track of important labor details, such as timing of contractions, changes in fetal heart rate, and the progression of labor. This may also involve assisting the midwife or attending physician in recording relevant data.

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## 3. During Birth

- **Assisting the Birth Team:** Helping with the delivery of the baby by handing instruments, preparing for immediate newborn care, or assisting with any tasks the midwife or attending physician needs during the birth.
- **Supporting the Birth Process:** Providing emotional and physical support to the birthing person and their partner during delivery, including helping with positions, relaxation, and breathing techniques.
- **Immediate Newborn Care:** Helping with initial newborn care tasks, such as drying and warming the baby, facilitating early skin-to-skin contact with the birthing person, and assisting with the first breastfeed (if applicable). The birth assistant may also assist in performing basic assessments, such as the APGAR score, under the guidance of the midwife or doctor.

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## 4. Postpartum Support

- **Assisting with Immediate Postpartum Care:** Supporting the birthing person after delivery, including ensuring the placenta is delivered and assisting with perineal care, clean-up, and comfort measures.
- **Breastfeeding Support:** Helping the birthing person with early breastfeeding initiation and assisting with positioning, latch techniques, and addressing common breastfeeding challenges.
- **Providing Emotional Support:** Offering emotional care to both the birthing person and their family during the immediate postpartum period, helping them to adjust and offering reassurance.
- **Assisting with Documentation:** Recording details of the birth, immediate postpartum care, and the newborn's condition as directed by the midwife or primary care provider.

## 5. Assist with Documentation and Record-Keeping

- **Monitoring and Reporting:** Keeping accurate, up-to-date records of the labor process, vital signs, and any changes that occur. A birth assistant may document aspects of the birthing process, but clinical decision-making is always managed by the midwife or physician.
- **Supporting Birth Plan Implementation:** Assisting the team in ensuring the birthing person's preferences, as outlined in their birth plan, are followed when appropriate, and reporting any challenges or changes.

## 6. Limitations of Practice

- **Non-Medical Role:** Birth assistants do not perform medical assessments or interventions such as vaginal exams, administering medications, or providing medical diagnoses. Their role is non-clinical and supportive.
- **Working Under Supervision:** Birth assistants always work under the guidance and supervision of a licensed midwife, physician, or other qualified healthcare professional.
- **No Medical Decision-Making:** Birth assistants do not make medical decisions or provide medical advice to the birthing person. They are responsible for supporting the birthing person and the medical team but do not engage in any clinical decision making.

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## 7. Emergency Support

- **Assisting in Emergencies:** In the case of an emergency during labor or delivery, a birth assistant may be asked to assist with tasks such as providing oxygen, supporting the team in moving the birthing person, or organizing supplies, under the direction of the attending medical provider.
- **Basic Life Support (BLS):** In some cases, birth assistants may be trained in BLS or neonatal resuscitation and may assist in emergencies, such as providing CPR or other emergency techniques until advanced medical personnel arrive.

## 8. Ongoing Education and Training

- Birth assistants are encouraged to pursue ongoing education and training, keeping up to date with new practices, comfort measures, and safety protocols. Continuing education is important for staying current with the latest best practices in maternity care.

The role of a birth assistant is to provide essential non-medical support to the birthing team, offering physical, emotional, and logistical assistance during labor, delivery, and immediate postpartum care. Their responsibilities are designed to enhance the birth experience, ensuring the birthing person is supported, informed, and comfortable, while also assisting the medical team in ensuring a safe and smooth process. Birth assistants are crucial to a positive and holistic birth experience but are always bound by the non-clinical nature of their role, working under the supervision of medical professionals such as midwives and doctors.

