



Module 11: Self-Care

As postpartum doulas we serve others, but we must also remember to care for ourselves especially when pregnant. Many of us are mothers and/or partners, students, and we may also be running a business. We likely have social commitments, volunteer commitments, and a variety of other activities in our lives. In order to be a good doula, as well as maintain the above, we need to be taking good care of ourselves in mind, body, and spirit. This means eating healthfully, getting good sleep, exercising, and keeping stress levels low.

Safety in Homes

The vast majority of doulas will not run into safety issues in the home. However, it is always a good idea to be prepared and use good judgment.

- Always leave the name and address of the family with whom you are working, with a family member or friend
- Inquire about pets, if that is a concern for you, during initial contact
- If a situation makes you uncomfortable, speak up. Rarely are comments intended to create discomfort and bringing them to attention is often all that is needed
- If you enter a home and are very uncomfortable, you do not need to stay. If you are unsure how to leave, try to give a non-defensive excuse to leave. For example, "I need to make a phone call. I'm going to step outside briefly. (exit to make a call, knock and remain outside) Very sorry, I need to leave, something has come up."
- Between your car and a home, do not chat on the phone or be distracted. Always keep your keys in hand.
- Acknowledge those around you with a smile, a nod, and a friendly gesture.
- Appear confident and collected

Balancing Schedule and Boundaries

It can be easy to want to accept every job presented when you enjoy your work. However, it is important to remember to keep a balance. Putting family first, allotting time for socializing and enjoyment, and then keeping work in its place can be essential to not burning out. Birth work is emotional, it takes personal investment, and it is service, so naturally it can be draining. If you spread yourself too thin you, your family, and your clients will all receive compromised care.

Decide how much you need to work to meet financial goals; decide how much extra you're willing to work beyond that; know your max and stick with it. Keep a detailed calendar with family and social activities and appointments filled in so you can schedule clients and prevent double booking. It is okay to say no. You do not need to accept every job. Become acquainted with other doulas to whom you can refer parents or work in a partnership, co-op, or even branch out into having doulas as sub-contractors.

We live in a culture that is used to instant communication and informal text communication. It makes it easy to ask questions and seek support at any time. We should provide our clients with adequate support but it is okay to set boundaries. Let clients know how they can reach you in between visits, your typical business hours, and when they can expect a reply. You can choose to give permission for your clients to text you at any time but keep your text notifications silent. Let them know you'll get in touch when you are able. If they need immediate support they can reach you via phone. It is best to return calls ASAP if missed during typical business hours, but calls after business hours might not be returned until the next business day. Though you may choose to reply after business hours, it is still wise to set boundaries and reserve the opportunity to focus on things other than business in the evening and on weekends. It is a personal decision to decide your business hours and preferred method of communication. It can be helpful to include this information in your contract or service agreements.

Universal Precautions

As postpartum doula's we provide only non-medical support, but given the nature of our care we might come into contact with bodily fluids. Part of self-care is ensuring you protect your own health. You can read more about universal precautions from the links below.

<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/bbp/universal.html>

<http://cfoc.nrckids.org/StandardView/3.2.3.4>

<http://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/disease/hiv.htm> – There are no guidelines for handling expressed breast milk as it is not a bio hazard

When you enter the home it is always essential that you immediately wash your hands to prevent you from exposing the family to germs as well as helping parents to feel comfortable. You should also wash your hands before handling bottles and pump parts. Washing after diaper changes protects you and the family. Many doula's are comfortable with hand washing following diaper changes and do not utilize gloves, however, if you feel more comfortable using gloves this is an item you need to provide. It is also a good idea to avoid bringing latex gloves in case of an allergy.

Debriefing, Support and Confidentiality

Whether you choose to work independently or with other doula's, many aspects of this work is solo. Supporting families during a vulnerable and life changing time is very rewarding but it can also be very challenging. An important part of self-care is ensuring you have mental wellness. Some doula's find journaling helpful, speaking with a counselor when supporting families through difficult circumstances, and many find debriefing with fellow doula's helpful. Sometimes having another perspective can help you develop a plan to better support clients experiencing difficulties and to help you debrief and process experiences.

When discussing and debriefing it is extremely important that you afford your clients the respect of confidentiality. While we are not bound by HIPAA, following HIPAA can help us to ensure we provide confidentiality and trust for our clients.

<http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/privacy/hipaa/understanding/summary/privacysummary.pdf>

Application and Understanding

1. Name two things you can do to practice safety in the home.

2. Scenarios:

- a. One of your doula friends has had a difficult birth. She is emotionally distraught and begins to tell you about it mentioning the details. As she talks, you find yourself becoming uncomfortable with the information she is sharing. What would you do?
- b. You have promised your children a vacation at the seashore and have rented an apartment there. Two days before you leave you receive a frantic call from a woman who is a friend of yours and who is “losing it” in the first week at home, suffering from fatigue, a crying baby, sore nipples, and her partner is away on a work trip. She has one other boy aged three. She is exhausted and begs you to help her saying she has nobody else to turn to. What would you say? What would you do?