

Business

As a trained professional doula, you have the opportunity to start an independent business as a solo doula, partnership or agency, or you can seek work through established agencies. There are pros and cons to each situation. What you decide will be a personal choice. Much of doula work, whether working independently or seeking work through an agency, begins with networking and becoming familiar with your local birth community.



Networking and Marketing Ideas

- Determine a name for your business. Check with the US Patent and Trademark Office to make sure the name you have selected is not a registered trademark.
- Start a Facebook page which is free.
- Build a website or hire a web designer. Using your own URL is a good idea to establish professionalism.
- Decide how busy you want to be, taking into account the responsibilities you have with your family. It is very important that you keep a balance in your life. Also decide what hours you can work within your family schedule.
- Make business cards or have them designed depending on your initial investment budget.
- Join Facebook or other websites and local doula groups, to meet other birth and postpartum doulas.
- Join local parent groups. Never spam, but it is good to become a familiar name in the parenting community.
- Reach out to prenatal yoga or fitness instructors, childbirth educators and birth doulas. Offer to take them to coffee, ask to briefly share at their class in exchange for providing refreshments.

- Reach out to midwives, obstetricians, and other birth professionals. Speak with their office manager to schedule bringing them coffee and refreshments or lunch and sharing briefly about your services.
- Attend baby and women's health expos.
- Volunteer on the board of local birth and pregnancy organizations.
- Place flyers, postcards, or business cards on community boards (only with permission).
- Host a meet-up for birth professionals.
- Set up a meet the doula(s) night for expectant doulas.
- Blog.
- Send press releases to local papers.
- Eventually, word of mouth will be one of your best marketing strategies.

Contracts

We highly recommend having a contract or service agreement for clients for your own protection and also ensuring that your clients understand your role and scope of practice. Some doulas do choose to work without a signed agreement but it is up to you to decide what you would like to do. The nature of postpartum doula work can be unpredictable as most families do not know exactly when their baby will arrive. It is also hard to know how much assistance a family will need once the baby is home.

Having a contract and deposit provides you with some financial security as you might need to limit the number of clients you take with similar due dates. Some doulas work for an hourly rate and do not contract a set number of hours, while other doulas offer packages that are purchased in advance for a set number of hours. You can decide what works best for you, your target client, and what is sustainable in your market. It is not uncommon for doulas to adjust their contracts as they become more experienced and learn what works best for them.

Living Wage and Collecting Fee

Many doulas enter this work because they feel a calling and are drawn to supporting women. It can be a struggle for some to consider charging for a service that feels like care, but it is important to understand your value. If you do not charge enough money for a living wage, in time you will likely leave the doula field in order to pay bills. In that event you are no longer able to support families in the way you felt called. You bring knowledge, support, and skills into every home in which you work. Adequate compensation is well earned.

As a newer doula, you might assume you should not charge, or that you should charge a discounted rate. Even if you have not worked with many families, your knowledge and skill set are still valuable.

Some will begin by charging 10-20% less per hour than their areas going rate until they are certified. Once certified, many charge the going rate.

The cost of living varies greatly, but in the US many postpartum doulas charge \$20-50 per hour. When deciding your fee, you can look at the going rate in your area, but as an independent business owner, you have the freedom to choose the rate that works for you. Take into account the cost of gas, tolls, childcare, food, etc when deciding your fee.

As you begin working, you might be nervous about collecting your fee. Having a service agreement or signed contract, can help alleviate stress around collecting your fee. Collecting a deposit can protect your time as well as ensuring clients are invested in your service. You are a caring doula, but you are also a professional doula and running your business in a professional manner protects you and provides clients with the service they deserve.

Bookkeeping and IRS

How you choose to practice as a doula, be it a hobby or a career, might determine how you keep track of your income and expenses. We highly recommend some type of bookkeeping so you can easily file your taxes. Depending on where you are living and working, you will have different tax responsibilities. If you have any questions, it is a good idea to meet with a CPA. You can also browse the IRS website. There are many apps, websites and services available for doulas specifically, as well as small business owners in general, to make bookkeeping easier.

<http://www.irs.gov/>

<http://www.mobiledoulaapp.com/>

<https://www.yourdoulabiz.com/Home/Default.aspx>

Social Media and Digital Communication

Many of our inquiries will come via email, social media, or other forms of text communication. There are several reasons why it is important to pay close attention to our text replies. We want to ensure we sound professional and avoid using abbreviations and slang to reply to first time inquiries. If you later have a more relaxed relationship with a client, you can respond however you are comfortable, but if you want to be seen as a professional for hire be sure your replies show your professionalism.

Text communications may come from potential clients that are not sure they are interested in services, or from curious parents seeking free advice. Your first reply sets the standard for your relationship and is an opportunity to connect and establish boundaries. You want to avoid answering specific questions while being clear of your excellent services. It can become time consuming to go back and forth with a potential client via text prior to hiring and there is no guarantee you will ever be compensated for that time. Below is an example inquiry and reply:

Hi Doula Diane,

I'm 36 weeks pregnant and I am really interested in breastfeeding. I've heard postpartum doulas

can help with breastfeeding. What pumps do you recommend? I'm not sure which one I will need. I've heard pumping can increase supply and I've also heard some herbs can increase supply. What herbs do you recommend for breastfeeding? I've also heard that you can help with getting the baby into a nighttime routine. What can I do as soon as the baby is born to start helping him understand the difference between day and night? I'm a first time mom and am really nervous about the lack of sleep.

*Thanks!
Sara Smith*

It can be very tempting to jump in and answer all of her questions assuming if you help her she will hire you. Unfortunately, for some, they may assume you have provided them with enough information that they will not need to hire you. We may know how much more we can offer but may not realize we offer a lot more than just knowledge. It can also be easy to come off as though her questions are silly and/or showing unrealistic expectations, but it is important to be professional and respectful. Sample reply:

Hi Sara,

First of all, congratulations on your pregnancy! As a postpartum doula, I offer in home, non-medical support for families adjusting to life with a new baby. I offer my clients support and education related to breastfeeding and establishing nighttime routines.

There are many available breast pumps with different features. I cannot make a recommendation via email as I am unaware of your feeding needs, insurance coverage and other things that would come into play when choosing a pump. Assisting clients with choosing baby gear is another part of my services. Infant sleep support and establishing nighttime routines is very baby and family lifestyle specific and is something I am able to assist with as I get to know a family and their sleep goals.

I would love to chat with you and set up a free consult/interview to discuss what services I offer and how I can support you throughout your postpartum experience. I can be reached at 555-1212 to answer questions regarding my services and to select a time to meet. I am available this Monday and Thursday after 5pm, and Saturday anytime from 9am to 3pm. Let me know which time works for you or if another time is better.

*Looking forward to working with you!
Doula Diane*

If the mother is really interested in postpartum doula services, she will likely contact you via phone or reply with a time to meet. If you do not hear back from her in a week, you can send a brief follow-up just asking if she has any other questions about your services. If you do not hear back, chances are she was not really interested in hiring you. By keeping replies brief, you lessen the risk of being taken advantage of. While the aim of a few mothers is to intentionally get free services, we need to ensure that doulas as a whole are seen as professionals for hire, not simply free resources available to all without compensation. This does not mean you should never offer free advice or assistance. This simply means being conscious of the boundaries you place if you intend to be hired by an inquiry. If after further contact you know she is not interested in hiring you, it is okay to stop contact or stop contact with a couple free resources such as: "Some moms find www.Kellymom.com helpful for

breastfeeding related topics."

In addition to text communication with potential clients, you might also have contact with peers, medical professionals, or other community members. Whether relaxed social media or a more professional email, it is important to present yourself in a way that would prevent someone from looking down on your business. When reaching out to other professionals or replying to them, just be sure you use formal email writing and avoid abbreviations and slang.

Social Media Tips

- Avoid becoming overly personal and presenting your anecdotal experience as fact. It is okay to share stories but be sure you make it clear it is not fact.
- Do not type anything you would not say to a peer face to face.
- Keep in mind that no matter how large a group you are in, there is always the potential that a local peer or other professional is involved and what you say can impact your business locally.
- Disagreements and debates have a place and are okay. Refrain from name calling, personal attacks, or criticizing others. State your opinion, why it is your opinion, and any facts you have as a way to respectfully disagree or debate.
- If you have a personal page/profile that clients and other birth workers will see, or a business page, be sure to share content that will not limit your client base UNLESS you have a specific client base. If you intend to serve all women, biased articles, overly political articles/statements and other controversial topics might be best to avoid. There is no right or wrong way to run your page, just be aware of who is your intended audience.

Putting effort into your postpartum doula business will help you to be successful in the long run. It takes time to build a business. It is important to believe in yourself and approach all you do with compassion and love. Then birthing families will be calling you.

Application and Understanding

1. Using the information from this training program, create a reply to a client inquiry asking what a postpartum doula is. Keep the answer under 250 words.
2. Aside from describing your fees, hours, and type of care you will provide, what is the value of a signed contract with your clients?
3. What do you believe is the most important thing to do to run your business?