

Building a Birth Team

Do I need a doula? Should my mom be there? And other questions related to birth attendants.

Brainstorming People in my Life

Birth unfolds best when we feel completely supported, loved, and safe. There are qualities in the people who surround you during birth who can make you feel this way. Their presence will actually help your birth go well because of it.

Consider who could fulfill the following needs. You can list the same person again and again. Listing someone doesn't mean you need to invite them to your birth. These initial questions are just an exercise in imagination and expanding your vision of birth support.

1. Who would make me feel calm in early labor?
2. With whom do I feel the most unhindered? Who can be with me without decreasing my sense of privacy?
3. Who would make me feel strong and help me believe that I can do this?
4. Who is my biggest fan? Who thinks I'm beautiful and capable of anything I put my mind to?
5. Who is totally accepting of me?
6. Who knows what I need and knows how to provide for my needs?
7. Who understands birth to a degree that I could look to them for answers, suggestions, and their opinion?
8. Who would know what to do during labor?
9. Who would I believe if I needed assurance during birth?
10. Who could take over if there was a medical emergency? Who do I trust completely to take care of me or my baby if anything unexpected would go wrong?

Ideally, you would like to have all of the above needs met by your birth team. Some women find that birthing with only their partner, the nurse, and the doctor/midwife fills all of their needs. Many other women choose this minimal birth team because they are worried about having too many people at their birth or because they fear that they will be embarrassed during their birth and there are few people they can trust. Other women have a huge "birth team" comprised largely of uninvited relatives and friends because they didn't feel they had the authority to ask people to keep away or they were afraid of offending someone. Having too many, too few, or the wrong people at your birth can indeed create birth complications, such as stalls in labor leading to failure to progress, the need for pitocin, and cesarean birth. A great birth team facilitates good labor physiology by helping you feel confident and calm and also meets your needs for water, comfort, music, and so on. Women who have a great birth team are able to labor the way they want to. For women who prefer not to have an epidural, the presence or lack of a great birth team can have an especially large impact.

Creating the Team Best for You

11. Who do you think you would like to have at your birth?

12. For each person listed in #11, write a sentence or two about the purpose of having them there. Why are you inviting them to your birth? What can they do for you? How do they make you feel?

13. Who else is likely to be at your birth (doctors, staff, family, etc.)? Why will they be there?

14. What concerns do you have about anyone who may be present?

15. For each person that elicited a concern in #14 think about the pros and cons of asking them not to be at your birth. Weigh this balance carefully, and risk sticking your neck out to advocate for the birth environment you think is best for you.

16. Are there any needs listed in questions 1-10 that most likely won't be met by the people you are planning to have at your birth?

17. If yes, list how those needs could be met. If you are unsure, consider interviewing a doula and asking if she could meet those needs. Discuss your concerns with your doctor or midwife as well and get their suggestions. If they tell you that they or the nursing staff will be able to meet the need you raise, ask for examples.

18. Pretend you can create your dream team - everyone you want, and no one you don't. List them here.

19. Look over your dream team. If you can create it, do! If you can't have this perfect team at your birth, do what you can to make your birth team as close to this ideal as possible. Use this space to make a list of people who you will ask to be at your birth, and a list of people who you will talk to about not being at your birth. After each person's name make some notes about your reasons for wanting them there or not. Plan a time to have discussions with anyone you need to talk to. Do not leave your birth team to assumptions, and don't put off this important work. It will be worth it!

Ask to be at birth

Talk to about *not* being at birth

Bonus Tips

- If you are afraid of offending someone by asking them not to be at your birth, consider other jobs you can ask them to do for you so they can be involved in a meaningful way. Provide clear guidelines about when and how they can be involved. Being thankful but clear is a good boundary setting skill and will come in useful as a new parent as well!
- If you are lacking support, look into hiring a doula. Doulas are present at births for a wide variety of reasons. If cost is a concern, call a doula anyway. They can usually connect you with low-cost or free resources available in your community.
- If you are lacking support even after exploring options through a local doula, write a detailed [birth plan](#) that will help your nurses understand your specific needs. This will help them be a wonderful support to you during your birth.
- If you are afraid to ask someone to be at your birth, just put on your bravery hat and go for it! People are usually honored.