

Having a baby is a big deal! And not something you likely want to do alone.

A Birth Coach's Role

A coach is someone who pushes you to try harder, encourages and inspires you, and keeps the game plan on track. A coach believes in you all the way to the end and never gives up on you! Your birth coach is no different. Your birth coach will be extra help, someone to run interference with busy nurses and staff, and someone to **just focus on you**.

Who Should Your Support Person be?

Choosing your birth coach is an important decision. You'll want to find someone who is committed to being there with you for your entire labor and delivery, **no matter how long it ends up being**. You will also want someone who will go through childbirth classes with you as well, so they learn your comfort measures, practice them with you, and know your birth plan. Who are your birth coach options?


 **Your Partner** can make a great birth coach. He can learn how to support you throughout labor and how to stay focused on your needs.

 **A Certified Labor Doula** is another great support option. Research shows that continuous one-on-one emotional support by a doula can reduce the number of interventions a woman may have in childbirth.


 **Friends or family** also make good support people. A family member or friend who has gone through labor and delivery will know the ropes and understand what you'll be experiencing.

How Can Your Support Person Prepare to Support You?

Whether you use a labor doula, your partner, a friend, or family member, they need to understand how to support you. Here are three ways you can train your birth coach to be ready for your labor and delivery.

 **1** They can **attend your childbirth classes** with you. Your birth coach needs to be knowledgeable on childbirth, how to encourage you in your birth goals, and what options you want regarding managing pain.

 **2** They should **know your birth plan** inside and out. Part of what makes a birth coach successful is that they know what to do without having to ask you too many questions.

 **3** **Practice, Practice, Practice.** Your support person should practice the relaxation and visualization techniques, rituals, and rhythms, and anything else you're planning on using to help you through labor.

"What-if" scenarios to practice with your birth coach

- Your nurse suggests Pitocin to speed up labor - how do you feel about it?
- How will they know when the pain gets to a point where you want to go to different plan?
- Would you like them to run interference with the hospital staff?
- What comfort measures do you want to try?
- Do you want them to suggest things to you or just do them?
- How would you like them to communicate with you so that they don't distract you when labor gets intense?

Tips for Your Support Person

1. Bring some gum, breath mints, or mouthwash for yourself, especially if you are planning on drinking coffee.
2. Bring something to eat or drink, but nothing smelly, like a tuna sandwich. Or eat it outside the room. Don't disappear to the cafeteria for long periods of time.
3. Take some short breaks when you need to so that you'll be ready when I need you the most.
4. Don't spend tons of time on your phone or device, especially when labor gets hard or goes long. I will need you to focus on ME, and I don't want to have to pull you away from your device.
5. Be flexible, patient, and forgiving. I may lose it or be short with you when things get painful and hard, but I won't really mean it.
6. Give me encouragement, not sympathy. Encouragement will help me stick to my goals. Sympathy will derail them. I'm running a marathon, not looking for a way out. You can do this by saying things like, "I know it's hard, but you can do this." "You've got this! The contraction is almost over!" "You're amazing, you did it. That contraction is behind us now!"
7. When labor gets hard, keep voices down in the room so that I don't lose my focus.
8. Watch for what I need. If I lick my lips, I might need lip balm. If I grab my lower back, then jump in to apply counterpressure or a hot pack. If I get fidgety, I might need the bathroom. I'll let you know if you're reading my signals wrong, but don't take it personally.

Your birth coach will be a great help and comfort to you. They may even help you have fewer interventions and keep you to your birth plan. You will need to choose the support person you feel you can best rely and lean on. ***But don't forget to train them!***