

The Attachment Needs of Laboring Mothers

Amy L. Gilliland, M.S., CD(DONA)

Bonding

- Bonding refers to the feelings that parents have for their child.
- Can happen anytime in the first hours to the first weeks after birth.
- Intense feeling of belonging, of caring. It has been described as falling in love with your child.

Attachment

- Refers to the feelings that the child develops towards his or her primary caregivers over the first year of life.
- A **process** that results in a relationship between the infant and his or her primary caregiver
(usually mother and father).

Consequences of infant attachment relationships are long lasting and influence all other relationships throughout the life course.

Attachment

Sensitivity refers to the ability of the parent to **read** their infant's signals and cues, and most importantly, **respond** promptly and appropriately.

Attachment

Secure Base behavior

- Explore the world
- Experience pain, fear, anxiety

Caregivers help infants to *regulate* and *organize* emotions and physical behavior

Attachment Figure -mother, father, caregiver, boy/girlfriend, mate, husband/wife, etc.

Attachment Behaviors directed towards someone to elicit comfort and regulate emotions.

Doula Labor Support Study

- *Twenty-nine doulas from across North America were interviewed*
- *Doulas represented a variety of locations, practice differences, and experience levels.*
- *None used clinical skills in her doula practice nor in any other job or career.*

Doula Labor Support Study: Mothers

- Ten mothers were interviewed in their homes at 8 to 14 weeks postpartum.
- All had independent practice doulas.
- First or second live birth.
- Pregnancy was not "high risk".

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- Doula care was continuous, used no clinical skills.
- No life threatening complications for mother or baby.
- At least one other family member present during labor and birth.
- Emergency cesareans were excluded.
- Infant spent no time in the NICU.

Doula Labor Support Study

In the presence of a trusted companion fear of situations of every kind diminishes; when, by contrast, one is alone, fear of situations of every kind is magnified. Since in the lives of all of us our most trusted companions are our attachment figures, it follows that the degree to which each of us is susceptible to fear turns in great part on whether our attachment figures are present or absent...

Not only must an attachment figure be accessible but he, or she, must be willing to respond in an appropriate way; in regard to someone who is afraid this means willingness to act as comforter and protector. Only when an attachment figure is both accessible and potentially responsive can he, or she, be said to be truly available.

-John Bowlby, 1973

Secure Base Described by Mothers

I just felt safe, like protected. Like someone was there that knew what was going on and knew all my options and wanted the best for me, and was, you know, was kind of watching over me. That's how I felt like she was a mother. Just, she's such a caring, loving person, and you know, there were lots of hugs... I think just the, I just felt safe with her, and I know she's such a good woman. Just like mother-nurturer, you know? Like she'd know, I just felt like she knew everything.

-Natalie, mother

Secure Base Described by Mothers

The doula becomes a secure base for the mother through her continuous presence genuine encouragement, and comforting touch.

• Properties of the Secure Base Function

One: The mother perceives the doula as *Available* to her at all times during labor

The doula is available when the mother first wants her during labor.

The doula's presence is continuous during labor and birth.

Two: The doula needs to perceive the mother's emotional needs accurately.

Three: The mother is able to trust the doula to effectively represent her interests during labor, to other people and to the mother herself.

Four: The doula is viewed as strong and capable, both emotionally and physically.

Five: The doula is seen as having resources, such as information and knowledge, which the mother does not possess.

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It is the perception by the mother of the doula as possessing these resources that is significant, not only their application.

How Doula Strategies Support the Secure Base Functions (See Triangle figure HO.)

Attunement

is the culminating process of effective labor support between mothers and doulas.

is the occurrence over time of a rhythmic, patterned, sequence of events where both the doula and the mother feel a sense of trust, oneness, and communication of sensations and the mother's need during the first stage of labor.

begins during the first stage of labor (dilation)

may extend into the second stage (pushing)

if not present during the first stage, it will not begin during second stage.

Complex set of interactive, dynamic processes involving all of the people present, events of the birth, and actions of the doula.

Attunement cannot be created by the doula, however the doula can work to create conditions where attunement is likely to occur.

“the acts and processes that let other people know that you are feeling something very like what they are feeling” -Daniel Stern, 1985

Attunement is an outgrowth of the mother's labor rhythm and coping ritual.

-concept of “rhythm and ritual” (Simkin, 1989)

Doula's Experience of Attunement is all encompassing.

Her physical body, thoughts, and emotional feelings are all connected in the present moment with this mother. It occurs fully in the moment but may last for hours.

Both doulas and mothers report a total immersion in the experience.

Not reflecting on it or thinking about it while it is happening.

Difficulty finding words to describe it as it is a non-verbal experience.

Attunement

Oftentimes you know what they need without them speaking. I don't know if its reading body language or what, but it's like you're definitely in it together. It's not something that comes and goes. Like when I'm with a woman in labor, I have every contraction with her. I'm not thinking about what I'm making for dinner or any other thing. It's totally consuming for me. Unless I need to pee. [laughs]

-Marci, doula

Conditions for Attunement (See Attunement Diagram HO)

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Affect Attunement Between Mother and Infant (Daniel Stern)

Describes the acts and processes through which the mother lets the infant know that she understands her child's internal feeling state.

It is only in the presence of the following three conditions that feeling states within one person can be knowable to another and that they can both sense, without using language, that the transaction has occurred.

One, the parent must be able to read the infant's feeling state from the infant's overt behavior.

Doulas do this through anticipating, paying attention and addressing the mother's immediate needs.

Two, the parent must perform some behavior that is not a strict imitation but nonetheless corresponds in some way to the infant's overt behavior.

Doulas do this by reflecting the mother's rhythm and supporting her coping ritual.

Three, the infant must be able to read this corresponding parental response as having to do with the infant's own original feeling experience and not just imitating the infant's behavior.

Doulas must be effective enough at the matching behavior that the mother can take in that she is understood and cared for.

Matching Behaviors are *cross modal*: Visual, Kinesthetic and Auditory

Examples: Head nodding; Facial expressions; Eye contact; Sounds

Level of intensity is matched in different modes

Changes of intensity over time are matched

A match in the temporal beat or pulsation of the behaviors

Conclusion

Doula care is more complex than we might have imagined.

Maternal attachment needs arise during labor and the doula is uniquely suited to meet those needs.

Doulas use a variety of strategies to meet mother's needs and involve complicated mental and behavioral processes to provide effective labor support.

Future Questions

What are the needs of fathers during labor and birth?

If mothers are cared for sensitively during labor and their attachment needs are met, do they become happier or better mothers? Is the attachment system between mother and infant affected by effective doula support? Between father and infant?

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Interrelationships between the Secure Base Functions and Support Strategies and Processes

Secure Base Functions:	Availability	Accurately perceive her emotional needs	Effectively represent her interests during labor	Strong and capable, both emotionally and physically	Having resources which the mother does not possess
Level of Strategy	Strategy				
Basic	Continuous Care	X			
Specific	Emotional Support		X	X	X
Specific	Physical Support				X
Specific	Informational Support			X	X
Specific	Advocacy			X	X
Specific	Negotiating Relationships		X	X	X
Implementation	Leading by Following		X		X
Implementation	Showing Up		X		X
Implementation	Be Who She Needs Me To Be	X	X	X	X
Implementation	Mother's Goals are Doula's Goals			X	X

This table shows how each of the doula's strategies support fulfilling the secure base functions for the mother. The levels of strategy refer to the elements of effective labor support outlined in the Elements of Effective Labor Support figure.

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Elements of Effective Labor Support by Doulas

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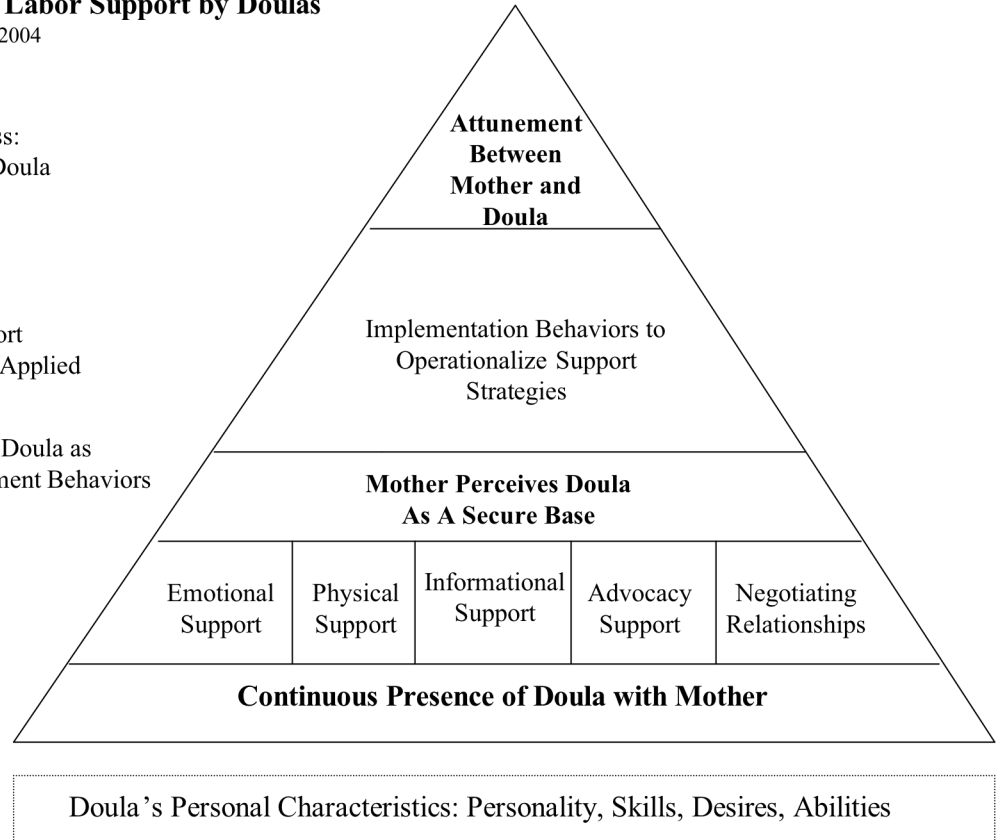
Secondary Level of Process:
Interactive Maternal and Doula
Behaviors

Level of Implementation:
How Specific Labor Support
Strategies are Chosen and Applied

Primary Level of Process: Doula as
Focus of Maternal Attachment Behaviors

Basic Labor Support:
Level of Specific
Strategies

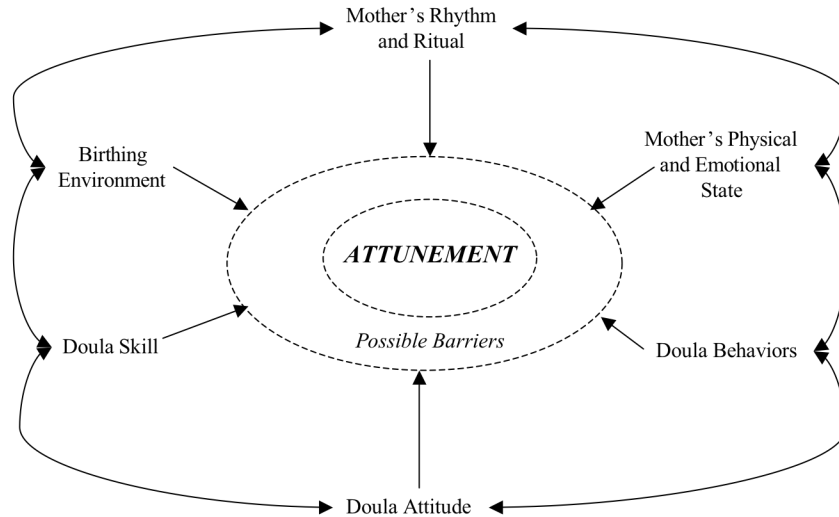
Basic Labor Support:
Level of Continuous Care



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The Attunement Process
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<u>Doula Skill</u>	<u>Doula Attitude</u>	<u>Doula Behaviors</u>	<u>Mother's Physical and Emotional State</u>	<u>Possible Barriers</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of birth process • Observational abilities • Ability to convey sense that doula is a secure base 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mother-focused • Non-judgmental • Empathetic • Confidence in mother's ability to birth • Willingness to push aside distractions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical proximity • Protective of space • Anticipating needs • Paying attention • Remembering • Addressing mother's immediate needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established rhythm of labor • Trusting of and open to doula • Ability to cope with pain using doula's help 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of doula skill • Problem with doula attitude • Problem with doula behavior • Precipitous labor • Pain medication • Epidural

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