

# A Doula's Fees

Many people ask about the breakdown of professional labor support fees. I offer this information so that you'll have a better idea of what your money is paying for.

## HOURS

Most first labors last longer than 18 hours; some can last as long as 40 or more. The average time I spend with a woman for her labor and birth is about 12 hours. I spend at least another 6 hours in prenatal meetings and more if the client chooses to have a postpartum meeting. Phone calls, individual research and responding to e-mails often adds another hour or two per client.

## CLIENTS

When I make a commitment to be available to attend you in labor, I limit the number of clients I put on my calendar to avoid birth conflicts and to ensure that I am reasonably rested when you go into labor. I try to schedule two to four clients per month. When I put your due date on my calendar, I commit to being available two weeks beforehand and two weeks after that date. This means that when I schedule a two-week vacation, I have to add another four weeks during which I cannot accept clients.

## SELF-EMPLOYMENT FACTOR

The rule of thumb is that a self-employed professional's income is only half of what they earn, after deductions for vacation and sick time, self-employment taxes, health insurance, and business expenses. Communication expenses are high for a doula, two cell phones with different carriers so I'm always reachable, a web site, and a computer with a high-speed Internet connection. I also have routine professional and office expenses and unusual transportation and supplies expenses.

In addition, there are supplies I bring with me to your birth and give you at appointments and interviews.

## TRAINING AND EXPERIENCE

It's important to me to keep up with all of the most current information. In order to attend conferences and training opportunities, I often have to limit the number of clients I can accept around the time I will be unavailable, thereby reducing the number of clients I can work with each year.

## INTANGIBLES

Being on-call all the time requires a very high level of personal sacrifice, including a willingness to be awakened after half an hour of sleep to go attend a labor for the next 40 hours. Personal family events are frequently missed or interrupted for births. When I go to a movie with a friend, we have to take two cars, in case I have to leave suddenly for a birth. I can attend a party, but I'll have to forgo that glass of wine and I have to bring a change of clothes with me wherever I go. I cannot take weekend trips away from DC, and even local appointments have to be planned around traffic conditions so that I'm never too far away when a client calls in labor.