



How Do You Know if Giving Massage During Labor Is Right For You?

an online resource
created to accompany

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and Postpartum Practice*
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How Do You Know if Giving Massage During Labor Is Right For You

Spend some focused time reflecting on and writing your answers to these questions:

1. What are my beliefs about pregnancy, birth and mothering? Are my beliefs about these things helpful in joining me with or separating me from my clients? Is it in my client's best interests to share these (my) beliefs with them?
2. What labor experiences do I have, whether positive or negative, that might interfere with my being neutral and present with my client as she labors?
3. Who do I become when I am with someone who is experiencing "pain," whether through fear or physical sensation?
4. What is the source of my own pain or suffering? Whatever – listen to it. What does it say?
5. What guides me and helps me to be a companion on another's journey?
6. What holds me back from being a companion on another's journey? What makes me afraid? Know it and have some affection for that.

A knowledgeable and gentle colleague, massage therapist, educator and researcher, Tracy Walton, offered this sensitive personal journaling exercise in one of her workshops. She presented it as an exploration of personal experiences and beliefs around working with gravely ill and potentially terminal clients. In this adapted form, it applies equally well



for pregnancy, and particularly for labor support work. Tracy is the author of Medical Conditions and Massage Therapy: A Decision Tree Approach (Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, 2011), and she can be reached at www.tracywalton.com.

INTEGRATING PROFESSIONAL LABOR SUPPORT/BIRTH DOULA SERVICES INTO A MASSAGE THERAPY PRACTICE

It is also important to explore the practical realities of being on call for births while maintaining a massage therapy practice. Most labors and births happen spontaneously between 37-42 weeks in a single healthy pregnancy (and sometimes earlier with multiples, preterm labor and pregnancy complications); therefore, it's usually a 4-5 week period of being on call while maintaining a schedule of massage therapy appointments and other life commitments. Some births including inductions and Cesarean births (for which great labor support is also important!) are scheduled.

Here are a few of the considerations and questions to ask yourself:

Business Structure

- Am I a self-employed massage therapist, an independent contractor or employee? What flexibility do I have with my massage therapy schedule when a client's labor begins and as it continues?
- What professional labor support/birth doula business structure would best complement my massage therapy practice? Should I be a "deck doula" with scheduled shifts at the hospital or birth center? Should I work in a pair or group of doulas where we each take shifts and/or back one another up when needed?
- If I am sick or have an emergency or if I am attending a very long



birth or in rare cases, have two clients in labor at the same time, who is/are my backup birth doulas who will step in to care for my client? How do I communicate my backup situation to my birth clients? Do my backups have the same or different philosophy of professional birth support? What is their style? Their skills? What is my availability to reciprocate backup availability to those doulas who back me up?

Being on call 24/7

- Are my family and friends supportive of my work attending births? Is it okay that I might miss someone's birthday party, graduation, or other special event, because I am at a birth? If not, how can I engage my backup doulas to help me?
- Do I have "doula angels" – people who are there to help me with my other life commitments while I am at a birth? Who takes care of my family, my kids, when I am called to a birth?
- Are my massage therapy clients supportive of my attending births? How do I communicate with my prospective and scheduled massage therapy clients about my on-call birth commitments? If I need to cancel massage therapy appointments to attend a birth, how do I follow up with my massage therapy clients?
- What are realistic geographic boundaries for attending births so I can join my birth clients in a realistic amount of time when they call for me?
- What is a comfortable number of birth clients each month? Each year? How should I cluster or space birth clients that balance well with my other commitments?



Massage Therapy Skills

- How do I integrate my massage therapy skills with my birth doula services? With the additional services of pregnancy and postpartum massage, how do I communicate the unique continuity of care that I can provide for childbearing women? What are my massage therapy rates and my birth doula charge?
- How can I develop my other labor support skills to offer my birth clients a variety of support techniques, especially for birth clients who are not receptive to touch in labor?

Self-Care

- What do I bring with me to births to nurture and sustain myself?
- What self-care do I practice before and after births to take care of myself, especially after long and/or difficult births?
- If I am on call 24/7, when is a good time to take a break from being on call?
- What are my resources to process my birth support experiences in an appropriate confidential way?

