

D O P O

Pain Management: An abortion doula's perspective

FIAPAC
September 21st 2024

What is an abortion
doula?

Abortion Doula Abortion Companion Acompañante

Anyone that physically, emotionally, and/or spiritually provide unbiased and unconditional support for someone before, during, and/or after their abortion, in service to safeguarding autonomy and social justice.

Dopo definition

Why are companion models of care necessary?

- Because people need people
- Support a more holistic and communal model of care
- Reduction of harm from oppressive legal systems and strained medical systems
- Mitigate the spread of stigma, misinformation, disinformation and lack of information
- Continuity of care

We are not a monolith.

Pain is a subjective physical sensation with physical, emotional and psychological components.

How do we support?

Before

Managing expectations + prep

Before

Informational support

- Share information on the abortion experience itself and pain management options
 - Help them create a care plan (for both at-home, in clinic and if planning to travel)
 - What do they need to have on hand?
 - Share practices and techniques on pain management

Emotional support

- A listening ear and non-judgemental support
 - Create a space for them to talk
 - Encourage them to explore existing support systems
 - Share exercises and practices for grounding and reflection

EXAMPLE: AT-HOME ABORTION CARE PLAN

Also, [Abortion Intentions Care Plan](#)

Adapted from Oberlin Doula Collective

LOGISTICS

- When are you planning to take the pills? If late, do you need overnight support?
- Who else will be around (during and in the period after you take the misoprostol)?
- If there will be children, do you need childcare?
- What plans do you have after your abortion is complete? (Family, work, school, other?)
- How would you like me to introduce myself to others in your space?

*** Share an essential items checklist**

SUPPORT PREP

- Do you know what to expect during the abortion? Do you have any supplies you'd like to use to help you feel comfortable?
- Do you experience menstrual cramps? How do manage the pain or discomfort?
- What are some comforting foods you'd like to eat/ teas you like to drink?
- How do you express yourself when you are uncomfortable (emotionally or physically)?
- What kinds of touch are you comfortable with? (Hand-holding, massage, other?)
- What do you do to relax from a stressful day? (TV, read, podcasts, other?)/ What does self-care look like for you?
- Do you have any ideas of what you would like to do with the pregnancy tissue once you pass it?
- Do you have any religious or spiritual practices or rituals you want to discuss? (Prayers, sacred objects, other?)
- Are there people you trust that you can talk to about your abortion?
- In the rare event of a medical or other emergency, are you comfortable calling XXX? If not, what is your safety plan?
- Do you have any other health concerns?

ANYTHING ELSE

- Do you have any questions or concerns about the process? What to expect?
- Other comments / notes / reminders:

During

Physical touch, movement + mindfulness practices

In clinic / Out-of-clinic / Virtual

In-clinic options

With or without a doula...

- Painkillers (ibuprofen, paracetamol/codeine)
- Heating pads
- Self-touch/ Uterine massage
- Breathing practices
- Stress balls/ Hand holding/ squeezing

Out-of-clinic options

- Painkillers (ibuprofen, paracetamol/codeine)
- Heating pads/ hot water bottle/ Warm shower
- Tens machine
- Massage + movement
- Breathing exercises

Pain management

What can this look like?



BREATHING EXERCISES

- Box breathing
- Belly breathing
- 3-6-9 breathing
- Humming/ahhh breath

SELF-TOUCH

- Jaw and neck massage
- Self-hugs
- Rubbing hands together + hand on heart
- Uterine massage
- Massaging vagus nerve
- Pressure points

MOVEMENT

- Yoga: cat-cow, child pose, pigeon pose
- Rocking
- Stretching
- Progressive muscle relaxation: tense + release
- Dance

NERVOUS SYSTEM REGULATION

- Journaling
- Smells (only out-of-clinic and specifically chosen by them)
- Sensory grounding
- Cooling the vagus nerve
- Containment (weighted blanket)
- Visualisations
- Nature (water, feet on ground...)
- Art + creating
- Herbal support

Practices

For reducing tension, grounding and distraction



After

Debriefing + processing

After

Emotional support

What may they be seeking?

- To debrief/ tell their story
- Support with processing the experience
- Fear of future pain post-abortion e.g getting an IUD fitted, pain from next menstrual period, sexual intercourse

How can you support?

- Listen to them
- Signpost them to other forms of care if necessary
- Can provide one-off or ongoing support if we have the skills to do so,

Conclusion

From an abortion doula perspective....

- 'Pain management' is not just one moment in the abortion journey but a combination of practical, informational, physical and emotional support.
- We provide support before, during and after with the aim of reducing anxieties and supporting folks to claim agency over their experience.
- Pain is not necessarily something that is scary or needs to be avoided, but can be reframed and worked with to support people through their abortion.

Thank you

Zachi Brewster

hello@zachibrewster.me
