

## Choosing your birthing partner

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During pregnancy you have a lot of decisions to make, but one of the most important is choosing a birth partner. Labour can be an intense experience, when you will need encouragement and reassurance. This is the primary role of your birthing partner.

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Having a baby is one of the most special moments in your life. It can also be one of the most exhausting experiences, both physically and emotionally. We know from research that having a birth partner/s with you who you trust and know well can help women have a positive experience during labour and birth. Here at the Royal Berkshire Maternity Unit we encourage all women to bring one or two partners with them for support.

When you are choosing your birth partner you need to be totally selfish and ask yourself “What can they do for me?” You need someone who will focus only on you and who will be an advocate for you providing you the emotional and physical support you need, often over a period of many hours. It should be someone who you trust and can rely on. It is worth considering having two birthing partners as this will relieve the pressure on them, it will allow them to have a break individually, without the worry of leaving you on your own. However, please be aware that if the situation arises that you need to go to theatre for the birth of your baby by either forceps or Caesarean section, there will be a restriction to one person going with you. As a suggestion, your birthing partner/s may be the baby’s father, your mother or another responsible adult.

In an ideal world your birth supporter would have attended antenatal classes with you, or have experienced the birthing process before so that they have an understanding of labour and birth, and can keep a calm head in what is a highly emotional and often very exhausting experience. It is more important to have someone in whom you trust and feel comfortable with to assist you in making decisions, and to support you both physically and emotionally.

Sometimes, it should be recognised that your partner or the baby’s father is not the best person to support you as some men feel anxious about being present, especially as the only support. Equally some women do not want their partner to see them go through the pain of labour or are worried about how they may cope. It is perfectly acceptable that the baby’s father is not present, and the individual preferences for that couple must be respected.

If you are considering an older child / teenager to be your supporter remember no matter how mature they appear, seeing their mother in pain can be a very distressing experience for them, and they may not be the best person for the role. We recommend that only children 18 years or older should be considered in case of any unforeseen circumstances arising.

If you need further advice about support in labour, speak to your community midwife.

For more information about the benefits that scientific research has shown is linked to having a birth partner or supporter who is not a healthcare professional (including reduced rates medical intervention and increased satisfaction with the birth experience) see:

- <http://www.nct.org.uk/birth/who-can-be-birth-partner>
- <http://www.nct.org.uk/birth/tips-birth-partners>
- <http://www.bounty.com/pregnancy-and-birth/preparing-for-your-new-arrival/birth-planning/choosing-a-birth-partner>

More information is available on the Trust website: [www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk](http://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk)

This document can be made available in other languages and formats upon request.

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