

## Postpartum Doula, Nanny and Baby Nurse: What's the Difference?

### By Hilary Lockhart



There are many options available to new parents. Including deciding who to help you at home after your bundle of joy is born. Parents often ask what is the difference between postpartum doula, nanny and baby nurse? And they want to know who they need to help them take care of their new baby. The ONLY common denominator in all the above is that there is a child involved.

Having been in this industry for more than a decade, and having held these positions, I have come to realize there is a huge misconception that these positions are the same. I will explain each role and the responsibilities of the positions and in doing so the differences will become apparent.

#### What is a Postpartum Doula?

New parents, especially first time parents, need help every step of the way. The postpartum doula is there to not only “mother the mother”, but also “mother the family”. She helps the family in every way possible by teaching parents how to bathe, burp, and feed their baby. The postpartum doula will help ease parents into their new role as parents, or help the family with older children incorporate the newest family member, by assisting the new mother, baby and the family within the first few weeks after the birth of the baby, by providing breastfeeding tips, household help, sibling care, meal preparation and errand running. Postpartum doulas do not perform medical procedures or give medical advice regarding the mother or the baby, nor do they perform

clinical tasks like blood pressure checks or vaginal exams.

According to CAPP (Childbirth and Postpartum Professional Association), “postpartum doulas should be good with children, patient, non-judgmental, and knowledgeable about newborn care and breastfeeding.”

Although she may not be a certified lactation educator or counselor, lactation support is included in postpartum doula training and certification.

A Postpartum doula knows signs of postpartum depression and can help find local resources to get the mother help. A postpartum doula is considered a wealth of knowledge; gaining experience from training, continuing education and hands-on work. Postpartum doulas can be certified through two well known organizations; CAPP and DONA. The postpartum doula may work from just a few weeks, up to 3 months.

#### The Role of a Baby Nurse or Newborn Specialist?

It should be explained that the title of Baby Nurse is not allowed in many states unless the person is a certified nurse. The responsibilities of a baby nurse, or newborn specialist, encompass only the needs of the baby. Her responsibilities are similar to that of the postpartum doula in that she provides newborn care and instruction. However, I have not found many newborn specialists that are willing to help “pick up” or do “light cooking / cleaning”, even if this is what the family needed. The newborn specialist’s role is always about the baby. There are many newborn specialists that are capable of helping with breastfeeding, but this seems to be the women who have had children of their own and have breastfed their own babies. The newborn specialist has many years of infant experience and actually seems to always have more experience when it comes to “sleep training” and putting baby on a feeding or sleeping ‘schedule’.

A newborn specialist typically works until the baby is sleeping through the night, but many families will use a

newborn specialist for just the first four weeks to adjust to baby’s schedule. Unlike a postpartum doula, a newborn specialist may come in after the baby is a few months old and “sleep train” them – this may take anywhere from three seven days, depending on the age of the child, sleep habits formed, and the sleep trainer.

#### The Role of the Nanny.

A nanny is nowhere close to either of the above. A nanny may watch an infant, but does not always start working with the family during infancy; she may even watch just school age children. The nanny role is more of the employee that follows the family’s direction. Typically they are long term and make year long, or longer, commitments. The nanny may come with previous nanny experience or just day care experience alone. Many nannies do not have the “book knowledge” behind them that the NS and PPD have. A night nanny may come in and do evening duty work, but will only do the basics; feed, burp, change, rock and put to sleep. No sleep training, advice, scheduling, and / or breastfeeding help is given.

When families call and ask for a referral for postpartum care, I start by assessing their needs. Sometimes the family needs to save money, their sanity, and just get some sleep. Often they are looking for experience, education, and guidance – which a postpartum doula or newborn specialist can provide.

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