

## What is Doula?

**Tiffany:** Hi everyone. I'm so excited to welcome my guest today, Gabrielle Nancarrow, founder of Gather, a space to educate, support and hold space for women. Gabrielle is a birth doula, educator and a doula mentor and runs her business Gather, while raising her three children, Camille, Audrey and Frederick. Gabrielle's also an author of a recently released book called The Birth Space. In this week's episode, we'll be discussing what a doula is, do new parents need one and why? Thanks so much for coming on today Gabrielle.

**Gabrielle:** Thank you, Tiffany. I'm so excited to be here.

**Tiffany:** It's so great to have you. Thanks for joining us. So it's always great hearing a bit about people and how they come into their role that they play in life now and the journey that they've, I guess, taken to get there. So before we jump into discussing all things doula related, could you tell us why you actually decided to become a doula, Gabrielle?

**Gabrielle:** Yes, I will, I would love to share that with you. So I first heard what a doula was when I was 35 weeks pregnant with my first baby, so it was pretty late into my pregnancy when I even found out what a doula was. I had no idea what one was before that. I was living in New York City and my yoga teacher suggested that I get a doula. I think she had a sense that I was a little bit disconnected from the fact that I was about to give birth and I was about to go into my first postpartum and I really wasn't that well educated. I mean, I had my yoga which was keeping me grounded in my body, but I didn't really have a lot of education behind me and I was pretty unprepared. I'd just chosen an obstetrician that a friend recommended. I was planning a hospital birth, but beyond that, I hadn't done any education and she just gently suggested that maybe a doula might be a good idea.

So I asked her what a doula was and she explained a little bit about it and then said, "Look, go to Carriage House Birth. It's a space in Brooklyn. They have doulas. Go along, find out what they are and see if it's for you." So that weekend we went to Carriage House Birth for a meet and greet doula session and we hired our doula on the spot and she was incredible. And I thought, and my partner as well at the time, he was just thinking the same as me.

Episode 4: What is Doula?

with Gabrielle Nancarrow, a birth doula, educator and a doula mentor

**Gabrielle:** (cont...) “Why had we not heard of this before and how amazing it was that she was there. And she was going to show up for us in the last weeks of our pregnancy and the birth as well.” So fast forward to that birth, it was an incredibly empowering experience. And she taught us so much just in the last weeks of pregnancy and then how she showed up for us at the birth was just incredible.

And through my postpartum as well, supported us through that. And I really didn't think that we would have had the experience we'd had without her. And I just remember thinking towards the end of my birth and as I gave birth like, “I want to do what you are doing.” The support that she provided us just made so much sense to me. I just thought without her, how would this have gone? And it just was a really honestly life changing experience. So that experience stuck with me that I went into my life as a mother. And I went back to work quite quickly in New York. And I worked for about a year after my daughter was born, but quickly burnt out. It was a pretty intense experience having a toddler and working full time, and it was just a lot for my husband and I and our daughter. So we left New York City and came back to Melbourne and all the while in the back of my mind, I was thinking I really would love to become a doula, this really makes sense to me. And it wasn't until I had my second baby, until my eldest was four years old, that I eventually went back to New York and trained at Carriage House Birth, where I found my doula to become a doula myself. So it took me a little while, which I think is quite often the case with doulas. Is that the seed is planted and then life happens and gets in the way. And I really felt ready when my second daughter was about one to really step into the work.

**Tiffany:** Wow. What a massive journey. It's wonderful to hear where you've come from and why it's meant so much to you. And I think knowing that things have happened the way they have, due to your own personal experience just means so much as well, and really speaks volumes about the dedication you must feel and the passion that you have for becoming a doula.

**Gabrielle:** Yes. Absolutely, I do. I'm so passionate about this work.

**Tiffany:** So Gabrielle, for everyone listening today, what is a doula? I know that's a really big question. And if you could just take us through that a little bit now that'd be really helpful for everyone listening.

Episode 4: What is Doula?

with Gabrielle Nancarrow, a birth doula, educator and a doula mentor

**Gabrielle:** So in short, a doula is somebody who shows up for you and supports you through a major life experience. So there are a couple of different kinds of doulas. So you can have conception doulas, birth doulas, pregnancy doulas, postpartum doulas. And if we're talking specifically about birth doulas, then there really are many emotional and spiritual layers to conception and pregnancy and birth that our mainstream maternity system just does not provide enough support for and as doulas we really fill these emotional gaps. We hold space for birthing people to process their hopes and their fears. We talk about their histories and their stories. All of the things that show up in their birth that maybe they're not given space to talk about in other areas of their care, in the mainstream maternity care. And before their birth, we provide them with a lot of education and information and support in that sense. So we're there to provide them with some continuity of care, which is really important, but it's really difficult to find in our current system. So you may hire your own midwife or obstetrician if you're going privately, but it's really difficult, especially if you're in the public system, to find that continuity of care. So I think that's why a lot of people reach out to doulas now and doulas are becoming more popular, I guess, because we do provide that continuity that's really, really difficult to find.

**Tiffaney:** I think that's so interesting because as I mentioned to you before we started talking today a little bit about the fact that I wanted to become a midwife myself and was looking into it and even then looking a little bit into becoming a doula and felt very passionate about learning more about this. And it was really interesting then to look into the types of models that were coming into play. And this was around eight years ago. So it was a little while ago now, but they were looking into those models of care back then. And I know that's probably come a long way, but I think there's still a lot more to be done in that area of continuative care. And I think that, like you said, if you can find a doula that can provide that for you, that's just incredible just to have that offering.

**Gabrielle:** I think so. I think that people don't really realize until they get into the system that there really isn't a lot of time in appointments. Even if you have your obstetrician, the appointments are quite short and they're very focused on the physical health of the mother and the baby. There isn't a lot of time and space to really talk about those more emotional and really important layers to this transformative journey.



## Episode 4: What is Doula?

with Gabrielle Nancarrow, a birth doula, educator and a doula mentor

**Gabrielle:** (cont...) So that is really where a doula comes in and we're just to talk to, hold space, bounce ideas off of, and just provide that education and that continuity that is really lacking.

**Tiffany:** So when it comes to all these different stages, I guess, just starting off with the pregnancy, what things can you expect from a doula during your pregnancy period?

**Gabrielle:** So from the minute we're hired, we are there for the birthing person and their partner, if they have a partner, to support them through their pregnancy and help prepare them for their birth and for their postpartum as well. So every doula will work a little differently, but in general, we are available by phone or by text or by email. From the time we're hired, we visit the family in their home, usually for two to three prenatal meetings. And during that time I drink a lot of tea and we talk. People say, "How long are those meetings?" And for me, I don't put a time limit on them. I say, "They're at least probably three hours, but sometimes I'm there all day. It really depends on what comes up in that time." But we're there to listen to the birthing person and their partner, their hope and their fears. I hold space for them. And we talk about whatever comes up. So everything from past losses and traumas to their cultural conditioning of birth, any fears they might have around birth. And that really comes with that cultural conditioning growing up. And it's this emotional preparation I feel that is really vital in helping people to prepare for the birth. And there's just not a lot of people providing this space for these conversations to happen. So that's the emotional support we provide, but we also provide really practical, informational support.

We help people navigate a really complex maternity system. We educate them on birth and their options. We talk about their rights in the birth space. We talk a lot about informed consent and what that really means and how they're able to ask questions to have informed consent for every decision they're making during their pregnancy and during their birth. And we will help them write their birth preferences and really prepare them as well for their postpartum, which I think a lot of people think, it's a bit of an afterthought for a lot of people, postpartum, but a lot of preparation has to go into that. So we talk while they're pregnant about their postpartum and how they're going to be supported in that time.

Episode 4: What is Doula?

with Gabrielle Nancarrow, a birth doula, educator and a doula mentor

**Tiffany:** Oh, that's so important. I think just keeping in mind that whole journey, because it really is such a long journey. It's exciting and it's wonderful. And as you said, transformative, but it is so important to think about all the different stages, isn't it? And obviously then being aware too, of the importance of those birth preferences again, and we've spoken a lot about this throughout our podcast episodes in so many different ways and forms. And I think understanding what your choices are when you do go or into that birth space, wherever it might be, or laboring space. Understanding what a birth preference is and knowing what it is that you want to have happen during that period is so important. And so it's great that you've given information about that and supporting parents through that journey.

**Gabrielle:** I think with birth preferences, people think, "where do I start? What do I put on them? And that I can't plan my birth, why would I even write them?" It's not about planning your birth. It's absolutely not about that. It's about understanding all the potential scenarios of where your birth may go and then understanding what your options and your choices are within those segues to birth. So, in the moment you might be put on the spot, you might be told, just make a decision on something and you don't want to be blindsided by something you've never heard about or don't understand or don't have evidence around.

So it's just about understanding and really doing the work in your pregnancy to feel confident, educated and prepared, and especially for your partner as well, because the birthing person can advocate for themselves, but only so much up until a point, when you're in labor, your rational brain goes out the window. So I think it's really important for that partner to really stand up for you as well, and know you and be educated and know what you're hoping for in that space and know what questions to ask. So you don't feel that you're just at the whim of what's going on, that you are really feeling in control. I think it's so important.

**Tiffany:** Definitely. I think having that confidence and understanding, and like I always say knowledge is power. I repeat this every single time I talk to someone, but I guess because that's a huge part of my role anyway as an educator and I think it's so important. You can't underestimate the power of having that knowledge and feeling that confidence that comes with that.

Episode 4: What is Doula?

with Gabrielle Nancarrow, a birth doula, educator and a doula mentor

**Tiffaney:** (cont...) So just take us through a little bit about too, if you wouldn't mind, I guess the role of that doula during that labor and birth, because obviously, preparation is really important and going through those birth preferences, understanding what happens, but what are the things that you actively do and you get support on from a doula during that actual labor period?

**Gabrielle:** Most doulas are on call from about 37 weeks. And what that means is we're nearby, we're ready for when you are going into labor. So from 37 weeks until when the baby's born. Usually, and every doula works quite differently, but usually we'll show up to support you during your labor when you're moving into active labor. So anyone who's given birth before would know that that early labor phase can go for quite a long time. So, it can be quick, but it can also go for days. So during that early labor period, we're there, we're ready. I'm often talking on the phone with people. The first five, six births I did, I turned up way too soon to the birth and then I was there for over 30 hours and I was exhausted by the end. We were all exhausted and I felt like that wasn't the right way to be working and it wasn't the support they needed for me.

So now I have my boundaries around when I show up at a birth. And usually it is when they're moving into that more active labor phase. Depending on how long they'll want, if they're having a hospital birth, if they want to stay at home for a long time, then I'll meet the birthing person at their home. If they're keen to get into hospital, then I'll meet them at the hospital. It's really totally up to them what they're hoping for. And we talk about that and we do what we can to plan that, but obviously that changes when labor happens and we can't predict how it's going to go. So we talk a lot about how they're going to feel about staying at home for a bit longer or wanting to get into the hospital.

And then once we're in the hospital, I set the room up. I make sure it feels more like a cozy, safe, dimly lit birthing space. So sometimes hospitals can feel quite sterile, but I'll make sure the lights are dim. The fairy lights are on, the diffusers are on, the salt lamp is on, we get the music on. All of that can take some time because depending on how we show up, a person might be in really true active labor. And that's not quite my priority other than dimming the lights, making sure they're down. If I have the time, that's the kind of thing I'll do. I'll set up the space.



Episode 4: What is Doula?

with Gabrielle Nancarrow, a birth doula, educator and a doula mentor

**Gabrielle:** (cont...) And then throughout the labor we provide physical support. So hip squeezes, accu-pressure, we suggest positions, we massage, warm water on the back, those kinds of things to help support the person through their labor. If they've had an epidural, then we're supporting them while they're on the bed to make sure that they're still in an active labor position. So getting a peanut ball between their legs, making sure that their hips are still open and baby still has space to move through, encouraging them to turn and all of that thing. So we're skilled in all sorts of labor from completely physiological birth to birth with epidurals, to water birth, to cesarean birth. So there's lots of options and ways that we can work with all kinds of births. But in true physiological birth, then we're doing a lot of that physical relief to help them through it.

We provide a lot of emotional support. So encouragement, empathy, just a quiet presence, just ensuring the lights stay down and her birth space is protected. And we do a lot of normalizing of the experience, especially for the partner who might not have ever seen birth before. So, they might be a bit freaked out by the noises that are happening, but we're always saying that it's a really good thing. Okay. She's moving into transition. This is what we want to hear. Things are going really well. We're normalizing it and encouraging them to encourage the birthing person. And then we provide a lot of informational support, like I said. So if, and when something comes up, like a care provider suggesting augmentation, where they want to add the Syntocinon drip to speed up the labor. We talk about that. We listen, I listen with the family. We listen to the care provider's recommendation. I remind them what questions to ask, and I ensure that they're really making a true informed decision. And I remind them of their rights and that they've got choices, which the care provider should be doing as well. But it's not always the case. So we're just there just gently reminding them that everything is a choice. And I very much show up for the partner as well. So a lot of people say, "There's a partner there. Why is there a doula?" I'm supporting the partner just as much, sometimes more, than I'm supporting the birthing person. Because like I said before, partners do need a lot of support and encouragement themselves and they need breaks. They need to step out of the room, they need a bathroom, they need food. So we're there to really make sure that they're feeling very empowered and involved in the experience and also having space to step out when they need to. So that's what we do the majority of the time through the birth.

Episode 4: What is Doula?

with Gabrielle Nancarrow, a birth doula, educator and a doula mentor

**Gabrielle:** (cont...) And like I said, caesarean, we support caesarean births as well. So we're there as well to make sure that during the caesarean birth, that the person's fully informed of all their rights in that space as well and doing what we can to support them and making sure that their choices are really respected and heard.

**Tiffany:** So Gabrielle it's so great to know that there's so many different ways in which you can support a birthing mother, but also the partner during that birthing process, no matter how it goes, whether it be a caesarean or whether it be a natural, physiological birth, like you said. So inclusive, which is great because I think some people might potentially think, "Okay, well, I only really need a doula if I'm having what they call natural birth or vaginal birth." Rather than thinking, "Okay, well, no matter how it goes, I still may need the support of a doula." So it's so great to know that you've got that ability to be that support person, no matter how things go.

**Gabrielle:** I've supported a number of elective caesarean births. The birthing people who have chosen to have a caesarean, and I've been there to support them through that experience. And that's been an incredible experience because this is the birth of your baby, and this can be the most empowering thing in the world. It doesn't matter how the baby's born. We just want to make sure that the birthing person feels in control, in their power, really supported, really respected. And we do what we can to protect that space and make sure that that's the outcome for the person, it matters so much.

**Tiffany:** Wonderful. So, moving on to post-birth and I guess like we talked about before, that postpartum and that period after birth is also really important. So what support again, could we expect from a doula during that post-birth period?

**Gabrielle:** I really wish that everyone had access to a postpartum doula. I think it's so important to have this care and it's something I've learned a lot more about. I've got three children. So, I wasn't prepared for my first and second postpartum, all that well, but my third I really was, and I had the support that I needed and it's just made the world of difference. So I really wish all mothers and all families had access to postpartum doulas, but what a postpartum doula does is that they really show up for the family in that, usually in the early postpartum period.



Episode 4: What is Doula?

with Gabrielle Nancarrow, a birth doula, educator and a doula mentor

**Gabrielle:** (cont...) So for the first 6 to 12 weeks after the baby's born, they'll come usually a couple of times a week, but sometimes more. They'll cook, they'll clean, they'll hold the baby while mom sleeps and showers. They can help with breastfeeding. They look after the other children, if they're older children. They provide some physical support, sometimes massage, herbal baths, that kind of thing.

And then they provide really essential emotional support for the mother, because the mother is going through a huge transformation post-birth whether it's her first baby or her fourth baby. It's a birth each time for the mother as well. So we provide birth debriefing. We listen to whatever the mother needs to share. So whatever she's feeling in that moment during those days, it's really important that there's someone there who's showing up for the mother and really holding space for her. So really we're doing whatever is needed to ensure the mother's getting rest and that emotional support. So it really depends on the family and what their needs are, but it's just making sure that we're there and we're providing that support and the mother's getting the rest that she needs post-birth.

**Tiffaney:** That's so great. And I know myself having three babies as well. I've got some bonus kids, but I have given birth to three. I think if I'd known more about what a postpartum doula offers, I think I definitely would've taken them up on that. Because each time I've had a baby as well, I've been in a different state and I've not had family support around. So it's been such a challenging time whether it be with my first, second or third, because of course, like you mentioned too, you've got these other children to think about when you're giving birth to say your third child. You've got these other two that you've got to consider. And with that comes its own challenges, doesn't it?

**Gabrielle:** It does. And it's such a sacred time and it's such an important time to be resting and really the mother, post-birth, should really ideally be doing nothing else other than resting with her baby and bonding. And if she chooses to, breastfeeding, for the first 40 days, the first six weeks and it's a long time, so we really have to invest in that support for the family. And it's really too much on the partner if there is a partner to do on their own, I think. So really making sure that there's, that support, that person that shows up for the family and does all that they can so that mother is really getting that critical rest she needs, is so important.

Episode 4: What is Doula?

with Gabrielle Nancarrow, a birth doula, educator and a doula mentor

**Tiffany:** Well, I mean what your body's doing when you're pregnant and then obviously during the birth and then postpartum, it really is the biggest life changing event that your body will ever go through. And it's the most, the biggest thing to overcome and get through and for your body to recover from, it's a bit like running 10 marathons almost, isn't it? It's like you can't compare it into that really, but you've got to think about it like that, I guess, too, don't you?

**Gabrielle:** You do have to think about it like that. And I think we prepare a lot prenatally while we're pregnant in like, we prep the nursery, we buy all the things. And I think obviously that's important and that's really meaningful for a lot of people. So I don't want to take that away from it, but I really think this should be a layer that's added to that planning and to be budgeted for as well. So not everyone can afford a postpartum doula. Absolutely, we need to recognize that. But if you can, and you've got the funds there, think about how you want to really prioritize that funding and maybe you get a secondhand stroller, maybe you don't need to buy all the things and maybe you can start saving early, at the beginning of your pregnancy or while you're planning a baby, for that postpartum support and really investing in it because you're investing in the health of yourself, your family, your baby, everything.

Just making sure that you're not cooking, cleaning, doing the washing, doing physical things like that, that will just tire you out so much and will mean that you won't feel depleted for years to come. This is a really important time to prioritize that rest.

**Tiffany:** Absolutely, I couldn't agree more. And if I'd had that, wow, things would've been very different back then, I can definitely foresee that. Anyone who can take on that support, hearing more about it today, I think it would be invaluable and definitely something to invest in. So what is the difference, real difference between a doula versus a midwife? Because I think, again, it can be tricky to understand where the roles collide or where the roles cross over and what the differences are.

**Gabrielle:** It's a really good question. So the main difference is that a doula is not medical in any way. So we show up for the emotional and physical support of the birthing person and they're partner. And a midwife is medical.



## Episode 4: What is Doula?

with Gabrielle Nancarrow, a birth doula, educator and a doula mentor

**Gabrielle:** (cont...) So while they're very much concerned about the emotional health of the birthing person, they also have to prioritize the physical health of the person having the baby and their baby. So first and foremost is that. That is their priority, the physical health. And some people might choose a doula over midwife, because they're looking for that non-medical continuity of care. So they might already have their obstetrician or their midwife in the system, but they really want someone to compliment that care. So really, we are complementary to what a midwife or an obstetrician provides, but really our focus is on the emotional side of things.

And that informational layer that potentially is lost without our care. So, hospital midwives love doulas because we're doing the work that they wish they had the time to be doing. So they've got a lot of overheads, a lot of admin, they spend a lot of time on the computer writing things and they really want to be doing the hip squeezes, the encouragement, they want to be doing all of that for the birthing person. And often they do and they can show up for that. But when there's a doula there, they're like, "Oh, thank goodness, we know that they're getting the care that we wish we could be giving them." So yeah, we work really beautifully with midwives and really complimentary with other care providers.

**Tiffany:** Wonderful. So in your opinion, this is going to be probably a very obvious yes answer. But do first time parents really need a doula? But again, if you can't get one, what would be something that you could think about doing too, is another question there just to pop in, because I think for those parents that love to have one that can't, what are the other things that they can think about doing, but that's the first question is, do first time parents need a doula and I guess your answer's going to be yes.

**Gabrielle:** My answer is yes. And I think even second, third, fourth time parents need a doula. I think it's really important to have a doula for all your different experiences. Because a lot of the time I'm working with second, third time parents who have had potential birth trauma in their past, who have had other things, traumas that have impacted their first and second birth that they haven't had a chance to really work through and talk through. So I think in my opinion at every birth there should, if you have the means, the financial means then yes, a doula is essential.

Episode 4: What is Doula?

with Gabrielle Nancarrow, a birth doula, educator and a doula mentor

**Gabrielle:** (cont...) If you are hoping to have a doula and it's a financial question, then there are student doulas. I mean, I did the first five births for free. I didn't charge at all. So there are student doulas who are working for free. So you can seek those out. I think it's a really good starting point. Beyond that, education is so important. So investing in something independent from the hospital education. So hospital birth classes have their place, absolutely. But doing an independent birth class is really important as well. So doing what you can to educate yourself and then books, reading books, and looking on the internet for evidence based resources as well, so that you can make sure that you are prepping yourself in the best way possible and getting all the information you need from really true evidence based sites. And so I write quite a lot about this in my book. And I cite the resources that I recommend, and they're the ones that do have evidence behind them. So just knowing where to begin, reading books and doing some independent of the hospital birth classes is really, really important.

**Tiffany:** So what are some of the resources that you could recommend potentially?

**Gabrielle:** One of my favorite books. I don't know if you've heard of Ina May Gaskin? She's an American midwife and I think she's in her 80's now. So she's been doing this work for a really long time, but the one thing I did during my first pregnancy was read Ina May's Guide to Childbirth. And if you can read one book, and I should be talking about my book here and saying, "If you could only read one book, read mine." But honestly, if you could only read one book, read Ina May's Guide to Childbirth, because I think it is just such a gentle, nourishing, wonderful, easy read. She has another book called spiritual Midwifery-

**Tiffany:** I've got that one sitting beside me on my bedside table and I've read it a number of times. I just love having it there. And it's just such a beautiful book.

**Gabrielle:** Yes. It's a wonderful book and it's more dense. Honestly, if you're really into this, read that as well, but the Guide to Childbirth is a condensed version of it and it's just such a great book and I really think it does set you on a path. So that's one resource and there's another. There's a film called Birth Time. So everyone should see the film called Birth Time.

**Tiffany:** I've heard of it. I haven't seen it yet though. I can't wait to watch it.

Episode 4: What is Doula?

with Gabrielle Nancarrow, a birth doula, educator and a doula mentor

**Gabrielle:** Oh good. And I think if you can go and see Birth Time, you're going to learn a lot about what I'm saying, but just a lot about our system and the system, if you are planning a hospital birth, which 99% of people in Australia do, then it's a really good guide to the system. So you're understanding what the culture that you're birthing in and the system you're birthing in. So yeah, read Ina May's Guide to Childbirth and see Birth Time and begin there and then start booking some education that is independent of the hospital. And then go from there.

There's quite a few podcasts at the moment as well, which I think are wonderful. So one of them is [evidencebasedbirth.com](http://evidencebasedbirth.com). That's a website and also a podcast. And that is just really good as you're writing your birth preferences to really understand the evidence of everything that you're putting into that. So that's a great podcast. So listen to that and then there are so many out there, but just start getting a guide that way. Start following some doulas on Instagram, you get some really great information free on Instagram as well. So start exploring that and just leaning into what feels right to you.

**Tiffany:** So do you have any stats that you can take us through briefly as well? I guess the reasons why a doula can be great because I think again, it's good to know that there are some stats that have been pulled there, around getting support from a doula and how it can make a difference in your birth.

**Gabrielle:** So I will talk about one, the biggest study that's been done into doula support and it was a 2017 Cochrane review. So the Cochrane database is another great resource as well if you want to look that up, but this was a Cochrane review and it reviewed 26 studies from 17 countries involving more than 15,000 women. And it found that birthing people who had continuous labor support, so continuous labor support could be a doula, most likely a doula or an independent midwife. It's not a midwife in the hospital setting because that's not continuous support, they're in and out of the room. And it's not an obstetrician because that's not continuous support either, unless they're staying with you the whole time. So really it was looking at doulas and private midwives, and those women out of all that 15,000 women, they experienced shorter labors, lower cesarean birth rates, lower epidural rates, lower assisted birth rates, that's forceps and vacuum, and the most important one I think is that they were more satisfied overall with their birth experiences.

Episode 4: What is Doula?

with Gabrielle Nancarrow, a birth doula, educator and a doula mentor

**Gabrielle:** (cont...) So I think that's the biggest thing that we work towards is that you're emerging from birth feeling empowered and feeling like you've done an incredible thing because you always have, but making sure that you're not emerging from birth with trauma as unfortunately one in three Australian women are. So we are working to try to prevent any trauma around your birth and the way that we can get around that is ensuring that you feel in control, that you're feeling your power and that you're respected and you're heard and you're really driving the experience. It's so important. So it's less about how that baby's born and really about how you feel about the experience and how supported you were throughout it.

**Tiffany:** Absolutely. So another question is, can doulas give medical advice and if so, what types of advice can they give Gabrielle?

**Gabrielle:** No, absolutely not. We are not medically trained, so we cannot give medical advice. So we help birthing people seek out evidence based information and resources and we provide them with questions to ask their care providers, so that they can make an informed decision themselves. And we remind them that they have rights and that they've got choices and we really support them to advocate for themselves, but we never advise them, that's really dangerously out of our scope. So if you had a doula who was giving you medical advice, that's a red flag.

**Tiffany:** Okay, good to know. So how do you go about choosing the right doula for you? I guess that's a big thing too, because again, it's all about choosing a care provider that's right for you. So what would you recommend for people listening today?

**Gabrielle:** That's such an important thing. So not choosing the first doula you meet is a good idea. I think it's really important to do your research and just get a sense for the different doulas working out there. So at Gather, which is a space and I run that you mentioned at the start, we have 35 birth and postpartum doulas as part of our collective. And a big part of the work that I do here, is to connect families with doulas that fit their budget, their location, and the most important thing is the energy. So really people come to me and say, "I'm looking for a doula. I'm hoping for A, B and C." And I always say to them, "wonderful!" I give them a list of doulas that will suit them and their budget.





## Episode 4: What is Doula?

with Gabrielle Nancarrow, a birth doula, educator and a doula mentor

**Gabrielle:** (cont...) And then I say, “When you’re talking to these doulas, choose the one you feel most connected with the one that you feel the most comfortable with. The one you think that you can be really vulnerable in front of because this is either your birth or your postpartum or both.” And they’re both, truly some of the most vulnerable times of your life. “So do you feel at ease with that person? Do you feel connected on an energetic level and your partner as well? Do they feel really connected to this person” if there is a partner, because it’s really important that the three of you are working closely as a team together.

So I think that you’ll know, as you start, if anyone’s out there listening, they’re starting to look for doulas. You really know. I feel like the first time you meet someone, you know if they’re going to be right for you or not. And I would say if there’s any sense that they’re not right, maybe they’ve been recommended a hundred times, maybe you think they’re an amazing person, but if it doesn’t feel right, listen to that gut feeling and don’t go with them because the doula will probably pick up on that as well and gently suggest that you keep looking for another one because I think that connection is so important. So really truly finding someone that you feel connected with is important. But how do you find a doula? Look, you can come to us at Gather and I can support you if you’re Melbourne based. If you’re not Melbourne based, I think looking on Instagram is a really good thing. There’s lots of doulas on Instagram now. So seeking out those in your area. Asking friends and family who may have used a doula, word of mouth. Sometimes if you’re in the public or even in the private system, like obstetricians and midwives will have doulas that they recommend. So checking in and seeing if there are any doulas that are recommended through the care providers that you’re going with is a really good idea.

So there’s a lot. I mean, the good thing about it is that there are so many doulas accessible now. When I was pregnant for the first time, seven years ago, it wasn’t the case. And I think it’s much easier now to find a doula. So yeah, I think they’re out there. You do have to seek them out, but like I said in the beginning, make sure that you’re choosing the right doula for you. Not just one you come across and you feel like you should choose them because you’ve met with them and spent the time meeting with them. Don’t do that.



## Episode 4: What is Doula?

with Gabrielle Nancarrow, a birth doula, educator and a doula mentor

**Tiffany:** Definitely. So what type of training do doulas go through? Because again, I think like you've mentioned, it's very different to midwifery care, and it's very different to a midwife. So what type of training do doulas actually undertake?

**Gabrielle:** It's a good question. So you can show up tomorrow as a doula in a hospital setting or in a home birth setting and say, "Look, I'm a doula and I'm here as a birth support person without any training," and that's possible, but really most doulas and most good doulas will go through some extensive training. So there's no minimum prerequisite training that doulas do, there's no official governing body for doulas. So there's lots of training out there if anyone's listening and hoping to become a doula. There's a few that I recommend, you can always reach out to me and ask me which ones I recommend.

There's only a few out of the hundreds available that I truly recommend. So for me, my training involved quite a few months of pre-work, so quite a lot of essay writing and research. And then I did three days in person training in New York. And then there was six months of quite extensive post-work as well. And then after I'd done the five births that I'd spoken about earlier, then I was officially certified as a doula. So all in all, it was about 18 months of training and work for me. But like I said, every training's quite different.

**Tiffany:** So how does a doula work alongside your birth plan, the rest of the medical team during the birth and labor as well? I know you've talked a little bit about it, but just a little bit more in depth for people listening today, I think it might be great to understand how it's going to actually all come into play on that really important birth day.

**Gabrielle:** So our role, like I said earlier, we really compliment each other with our different skills and priorities and the most important thing for all of us in the room is supporting and protecting the birthing person and working together to make sure that they're so space is protected and they're getting the information and the support that they really need. So in my personal experience, one of the most important things I can do is to protect the space of the birthing person and to really work harmoniously with the care providers in the room and to ensure that there's no friction, which can really easily disrupt the energy of the birth space. So I'm making sure that if it does come to that, then the birth partner's often stepping out of the room and talking to the care provider if needed.



## Episode 4: What is Doula?

with Gabrielle Nancarrow, a birth doula, educator and a doula mentor

**Gabrielle:** (cont...) So we're doing a lot of work to really protect that birthing person from anything like that. And like I said, most obstetricians and most midwives are just so supportive of having doulas in the space because it really is an extra support for the birthing person. And at the end of the day, our priority is making sure that they feel really safe and protected. So we're all working together in that. So, that's probably what I would say.

**Tiffany:** Wonderful. Well, thank you so much for joining us today Gabrielle. It's been wonderful learning a bit more about what a doula is and the role they play in pregnancy and in the labor. And then obviously post-birth. So thank you so much for coming on.

**Gabrielle:** Thank you so much for having me, Tiffany. It's been a joy in speaking to you.

**Tiffany:** Well, I've loved learning all about it, I guess, because of my passion as well in wanting to potentially become a midwife in the future, it's really exciting to chat with you a bit more about it today. So thanks so much.

**Gabrielle:** Wonderful. Thank you.

**Tiffany:** I hope you've learned a few things while listening today. If you'd like to learn more about doulas and the support they offer, you can head to [www.gatherwomenspace.com](http://www.gatherwomenspace.com) or follow them on Instagram at Gather Women Space.