

### Current Mom Interview:

In college, experienced ridiculous pain with period. Stabbing cramps in vagina and bottom. Wasn't sure what the pain was, and met with doctor. Was adverse to birth control because wanted to be holistic. Was concerned about endometriosis, didn't really see that much information out there until the past 2 years. Doctor was white male, which already made her uncomfortable. Found him through medical network, not a family doctor. Going off what her mom provided. Only solution the doctor provided was birth control, or to "cut her stomach open which wouldn't look too good on the beach." After seeing the doctor, was very upset and felt like she couldn't rely on doctor to help her. In those types of practices, didn't see the same doctor every single time, patients go through a rotation of doctors. First and last time seeing him.

Did her own research for more holistic care, change her diet. Tried birth control for 6-9 month but physically didn't feel well. As soon as she stopped birth control, pain came back. Started working with holistic doctor, recommended alkaline diet, alot of citrus and cayenne, anti-inflammatory. Got pregnant, and some doctors questioned her endometriosis treatment. Mandated test which requires surgery for a diagnosis of endometriosis. There's "no cure." Would have to consistently do procedure. Never did it, decided to take matters into her own hand. Decided to have her daughter early to prevent chances of not being able to have kids later. Because of endometriosis, had extreme urination during pregnancy, felt like it was not normal for pregnant women. Would tell doctors about symptoms, but brushed it off as "well this is what happens." Saw a lot of urinary tract doctors and "specialists," every time she went to the doctor they wanted to test her for UTI and it always came back negative but never explored other options outside of surgical test. Nothing was suggested outside of UTI tests. Doctors kept scheduling her for sonograms and eventually had to pay a massive bill because she passed certain amount covered by insurance, felt like doctors took advantage of her as a young mother for more profit. Also, doctors just saying "well you're pregnant, theres not much we can do about it now, we can fix it after." Couldn't sleep because she had to pee every 3-5 minutes (times herself). Had to stop working at a certain point. Was a major disruptor, and doctors just let it continue, "theres nothing we can do." After she had her daughter, she visited multiple doctors and said "if youre not willing to do the test theres nothing we can do." or prescribed medication for bladder control, which had no effect. Couldn't afford holistic doctor.

During birth felt like she was under a lot of pressure. Didn't want to give birth in a hospital, but mother was adamant about her having birth at the hospital. Did get to choose the hospital, supposed to be one of the best hospitals in her area and worked very closely with OBGYN facility she went to. Was thinking about changing doctors because mother had consistent doctor when mom gave birth but interviewee didn't see the same doctor throughout pregnancy. Was concerned who her doctor would be during pregnancy. Didn't know who her delivery doctor would be until she was delivering. Didn't really have time to process that because she was in pain. Hospital was 20-30 minutes away from her house, hospitals closer to her house had really bad reputation and that she would have a higher chance of death if she went to those hospitals. Even as a young child, didn't go to local hospitals. (Jamaica Hospital) Didn't think about going farther for hospital because its been normalized. Didn't want to get an epidural because of

potential adverse effect or being pushed into unnecessary procedures. Decided to appease everyone and have her daughter in a hospital. Extreme pressure to receive epidural and extreme pain because of endometriosis. Ended up getting epidural and it didn't work.

Episiotomy for no reason. Was pushing and doctor just did an episiotomy without consent. Afterwards when she asked why the doctor cut her, doctor said "oh we wanted to give your daughter more room, we didn't want you to rip." Patient felt like that wasn't necessary and didn't receive any alert from doctor that the procedure was needed. After birth, had only one check in call from doctor. Much less attention than when she was pregnant. Did receive information at the hospital about aftercare and after that her mom helped her. And one appointment after to check on episiotomy. Got both verbalized and written documentation. Felt that in her area, she didn't have access to doctors who would take more care or more affluent to receive better care.

After pregnancy, didn't feel like there were many complications other than extremely large bills. Recovery was ok, but did suffer from post-partum depression but didn't really notice it until about 2 years later. Now currently in therapy, to talk through experiences.

Lack of communication in the black community about periods, childbirth and grief. Has multiple friends who have had atopic pregnancies and were on birth control. Both were on intrauterine birth control.

Really important to research and understand your body and how it works before you give birth. Have to understand what we're preparing our bodies for before we conceive. Doctors should provide much more empathy and proactive care to their patients. A lot of people don't have a consistent doctor they see, and jumping from doctor to doctor is exhausting and you lose the personal relationship. Wish she had the resources to have a doula. Felt like she was stuck in a place of the unknown and was so terrified of not being able to have a kid. A lot of friends have had miscarriages or aborted before they graduated from college. Intentionally got pregnant because she was nervous about being able to conceive.

Wish she knew how endometriosis coupled with pregnancy would affect her body and mental state. Wish there was more information online that would've informed her. Would go on endometriosis counseling sites and web forums and oftentimes made her more depressed because there were no solutions or cure. More positive and research based information.

Would've been really cool to have a chat room to speak with professionals to ask questions to help moms who were dealing with pregnancies. (such as mental health chat rooms or text services to answer questions quickly and easily). Podcasts are calming, would be cool to link to podcasts about pregnancies. Can't always read but would cool to listen to podcasts while they're on the go.

### Doula Interview:

Winding path to becoming a doula, always have had an interest in preventing violence against women, was exposed to DV and wanted to understand what drives DV, how can we address it and fix the problem. As she dug into DV, she learned even more about women's health problems. Got into reproductive justice and how other health problems can be exacerbated when a women experience sexual violence. Went to grad school, and became even more exposed. Learning about childbirth and pregnancy in America became more prominent to her. Saw the statistics, was seeing super high mortality rates for moms and infants during her grad program in Atlanta. Decided to merge her interests in DV and reproductive justice and maternal and child health. Did her study on racism as a form of violence, and how that impacts maternal health outcomes. Started working in an indirect field and wanted to stay more involved in maternal health, wanted to support her community and connect with women in her area. Decided to look into being a doula.

Started holding different events around maternal health. Was introduced into another organization called the **Birth Well** in Baltimore that offers doula training. Did birth workshops and from Day 1, felt like it was a perfect fit. Was seeing alarming statistics and wanted to a part of the solution. Can advocate for women, remind people what their rights are, and provide support in a lot of ways so it decreases the chances of a negative health outcome. Despite advances and access we have, racism is still the underlying issue. Racism manifests in many different ways, from one interaction with a provider through postpartum. Providers being dismissive and pushing issues off, believe patients are exaggerating. Gaslighting causes moms to question the validity of their experiences and the severity of their symptoms which can be deadly. Microaggressions. Issues that could have been caught MUCH earlier if the provider had listened to patients. Another way is providers making decisions for patients without their consent or going against patient's wishes. Having birth at home vs in hospital, the patients have different levels of autonomy. For example, not wanting to have unnecessary medications or interventions but doctors push for the "norm" and pressure patients into agreeing. Doctors not doing things for the comfort of the mother (not being able to choose your birth position or being able to move around) or forcing a cesarean. Advises people to be very intentional about what provider they're using and what hospital you go to because you will be at the mercy of that provider/hospital's procedures. After birth, similar experiences of doctors negating mothers feelings postpartum or leaving moms for hours to attend to others which can lead to other issues. Just listen to black women. If you look at historical images of women giving birth, most of them are in a squatting position.

Best way to advocate for yourself is to know your rights, don't just believe the doctor. Best way to address it to be informed beforehand. You have the right to choose your provider or fire them. They have options. Also you have the right to refuse interventions, ask for alternatives, or pros and cons. Have the right to have a full understanding before you give consent. Have a right to express your culture and personal preferences and requests for specific people (within limits of hospital staff). Having the support of a doula can help ensure patients rights are being maintained. Making sure you have a birth plan, make sure providers have access to your birth

plan. Start talking to your provider earlier about your birth plan and see how they respond, which can help gauge the proper fit. If you cannot pick your provider or your hospital, PLEASE GET A DOULA. The doula can help you prepare these things beforehand so the family has a plan with the new provider. When they see that you are supported and have advocates, doctors may be more likely to respond. Also, if birthing at home is possible, recommend birthing at home because you have the most autonomy. If pregnancy is low-risk, and have access to midwives, then its perfectly fine to birth at a hospital or find a birthing center if possible.

Some insurance companies cover doula service, BUT outside of getting coverage through medicaid, more often than not you have to pay for the service and be reimbursed through a claim. Doulas have a specific number assigned to them for insurance companies to pay the doula directly. Which is limiting. But there are doulas who do services for free, especially doulas in training. Most doulas will do a sliding scale, or some sort of accommodation for financially limited patients. Recommend checking beforehand to confirm if it's covered. Be open and honest with your doula about your finances. Some doulas have different packages for supporting moms at different stages of their pregnancies.

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