The Partner's Guide

How to support her through pregnancy, birth and the fourth trimester

Partners are not spectators — you are part of the care team. Research from mothers in our community found that when partners are informed and involved, women feel safer, better advocated for, and less alone. This guide gives you a practical job description.

During pregnancy

- Come to appointments and scans whenever you can — two sets of ears catch more, and your presence signals that her concerns matter.
- Learn the basics with her: attend antenatal classes together (yes, they are for you too). If classes clash with work, ask about evening or online options.
- Know the warning signs that need urgent action: severe headache, vision changes, sudden swelling, reduced baby movements, bleeding, waters breaking early, severe itching. Your job: take them seriously and make the call, even at 3am.
- Take on the mental load: book appointments, research classes, prepare the hospital bag, fit the car seat, plan the route to hospital.
- Talk about the birth plan so you can speak up for her wishes when she is busy doing the hardest work in the room.

During labour — your job description

- Be her advocate: know her birth plan, ask the questions she cannot, and make sure things are explained before consent is given. A useful set of questions for any intervention is BRAIN: Benefits? Risks? Alternatives? Instinct? What if we do Nothing for now?
- Be her comfort: water after every contraction, cool flannel, massage, holding her hand, steady breathing with her, words of encouragement — and knowing when to be quiet.
- Protect the space: manage phones, visitors, lights and noise.
- If she is not being listened to, say calmly and clearly: “She has told you she is in pain / worried. Please examine her and record it in the notes.” Persistence is not rudeness — it is advocacy.
- If things change fast (emergency caesarean, baby needing help), stay calm, stay close, keep talking to her, and ask the team to keep you both informed.

The fourth trimester — the weeks after birth

- She is recovering from a marathon (and possibly major surgery). Take over the home: food, washing, visitors, older children. Gatekeep visitors ruthlessly and kindly.
- Night shifts count: winding, settling, nappies, bringing baby for feeds. If she is breastfeeding, your job is everything around the feed.
- Learn feeding support basics with her — and know where help lives: National Breastfeeding Helpline 0300 100 0212.
- Watch her recovery: heavy or sudden bleeding, fever, severe headache, chest pain, a red swollen leg, or wound problems need urgent medical attention. Make the call.
- Watch her mind as well as her body. Baby blues in the first two weeks are common; if low mood, anxiety, anger, or withdrawal persist or deepen — or she says she feels hopeless — gently help her

get support (GP, health visitor, PANDAS 0808 1961 776). If you are ever worried about her immediate safety, treat it as an emergency.

- Look after yourself too. Partners can experience postnatal depression and birth trauma. Talking helps — PANDAS supports dads and partners as well.

Cultural strength, shared load

In many families and cultures, the man is expected to be the spokesperson — but in maternity care, her voice must lead. The strongest thing a partner can do is amplify her voice, not replace it: “Tell them what you told me.” And where family traditions bring expectations about birth or recovery, be the bridge: honour what matters, and protect her right to choose what happens to her body.

Your quick reference card

Maternity triage	Save your unit's number in your phone NOW: _____
Reduced movements	Call triage immediately — never wait until morning
Emergency	999
NHS advice	111
Feeding help	National Breastfeeding Helpline 0300 100 0212
Mental health (parents)	PANDAS 0808 1961 776

This guide is general information, not medical advice. Always speak to your midwife, GP or health visitor about your circumstances. In an emergency call 999.