



# PREGNANCY & SUBSTANCE USE: A PEER'S ROLE

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## Module 1.2: Tools, Ethics, and Boundaries

### Cultural Perspectives on Childbirth, Family, and Health

**NOTE:** Always ask the person what *they* want and need. Not everyone practices their culture's traditions, and not every cultural tradition is accepted or understood in the United States. Cultural humility means listening, learning, and never assuming.

Here's a list of **different cultural identities or communities** in the United States organized around **human basic commonalities**, things we all share like the need for safety, connection, survival, dignity, identity, and meaning. This approach helps peer doulas and other helpers see culture as more than race or ethnicity; it includes lived experience, values, and systems people navigate.

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#### Survival & Livelihood

**Cultures formed around how people survive, provide, and meet basic needs.**

- Unhoused communities
- Migrant farmworkers
- Sex workers
- Street economies (e.g., drug trade)
- People on public assistance (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families [TANF], Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program [SNAP], Medicaid)



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- People with disabilities navigating Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
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### Language & Identity

**Cultures shaped by language, ethnicity, and heritage.**

- Latinx communities (e.g., Mexican, Puerto Rican, Salvadoran)
  - African American or Black communities
  - Native/Indigenous Nations (e.g., Navajo, Tlingit, Lakota)
  - Asian American communities (e.g., Chinese, Vietnamese, Filipino)
  - Middle Eastern/North African communities (e.g., Arab, Persian, Kurdish)
  - Refugee communities (e.g., Afghan, Somali, Ukrainian)
  - Deaf/Hard-of-hearing communities
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### Mental Health & Neurodiversity

**Cultures around how people experience and process the world.**



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- People with lived experience of mental illness (e.g., schizophrenia, bipolar)
  - Neurodivergent communities (e.g., autism, ADHD)
  - Trauma survivors (e.g., complex post-traumatic stress disorder [CPTSD], domestic violence [DV] survivors, intimate partner violence [IPV] survivors)
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## Health, Recovery, & Substance Use

**Cultures based on health needs, stigmas, or healing practices.**

- People who use drugs (PWUD)
  - Recovery communities (e.g., Alcoholics Anonymous [AA], Narcotics Anonymous [NA], SMART Recovery, harm reduction, Medication-Assisted Treatment [MAT])
  - Chronic illness communities (e.g., diabetes, HIV/AIDS, long COVID)
  - Birthing and postpartum people (PPP)
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## Family, Gender, & Sexuality

**Cultures rooted in family roles, gender identities, and chosen families.**

- Single parents or teen parents



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- LGBTQIA+ communities
  - Trans and nonbinary communities
  - Polyamorous and chosen family networks
  - Elders raising grandchildren
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## Values, Faith, & Belief

**Cultures grounded in belief systems or guiding principles.**

- Christian (e.g., Baptist, Catholic, Pentecostal)
  - Muslim communities
  - Jewish communities
  - Buddhist, Hindu, and Sikh communities
  - Indigenous spiritual traditions
  - Atheist, agnostic, or secular humanist communities
  - 12-step or spiritual recovery groups
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### System Impact & Justice

**Cultures shaped by interactions with institutions of power.**

- Formerly incarcerated people
- People with open child welfare cases
- Veterans
- Immigrant and undocumented communities
- Youth in foster care or juvenile justice

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### Geography & Place

**Cultures tied to region, community, and environment.**

- Urban poverty/suburban displacement
- Rural/frontier communities
- Reservation life
- Borderland communities
- Alaskan villages and bush communities
- Southern, Midwest, Appalachian, or coastal identities



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This resource provides a glimpse into how different cultures may view pregnancy, birth, postpartum care, and family roles. While every individual is unique, and cultural practices vary widely, even within the same group, understanding these general values can help peer doulas approach their work with greater cultural humility, respect, and sensitivity. This list is not a complete list. Educating ourselves is ongoing.

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## AFRICA

- **Zulu (South Africa):** Birth is seen as a deeply spiritual event. Elders and female relatives often play a key role. Traditional herbal remedies may be used during labor and postpartum.
  - **Yoruba (Nigeria):** Naming ceremonies are important, often held on the 7th or 8th day. Ancestors and spiritual protection are honored throughout pregnancy.
  - **Somali:** Privacy is highly valued. Pregnancy may not be publicly discussed. The postpartum period (called "afatanbah") includes 40 days of rest and special care.
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## ASIA

- **Han Chinese:** Postpartum confinement ("zuo yuezi") is observed, typically 30 days of rest, specific foods, and avoidance of cold to restore balance in the body.
  - **Japanese:** Minimal interventions are preferred during birth. Quiet birthing environments are respected. Family modesty is important.
  - **Hmong:** Spiritual beliefs play a central role. A baby may not be named until a special soul-calling ceremony. Traditional healing may be used alongside modern medicine.
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### NORTH & CENTRAL AMERICA

- **Diné/Navajo:** Birth is sacred and connected to the land. Traditional midwives may be involved. Blessingway ceremonies honor the pregnant person.
- **Mexican (Mestizo/Indigenous):** The postpartum period, or "cuarentena," is a time of rest and maternal healing. Warm foods and teas are encouraged; cold is avoided.
- **Guatemalan (Maya):** Birth and postpartum customs include massage, use of rebozos (shawls), and herbal baths. Community midwives often guide care.
- **African American:** Many African American families maintain strong traditions of matriarchal support and faith-based community care. Due to systemic racism and historical trauma, medical mistrust may exist. Peer doulas can provide culturally attuned care by acknowledging these realities and affirming autonomy, resilience, and cultural pride.
- **White American (varied European descent):** Practices vary widely. Some families may value natural or home birth options, while others follow mainstream hospital-based models. Increasing numbers are exploring holistic postpartum traditions like placenta encapsulation or doulas.
- **Indigenous (other U.S. Tribes):** Traditions differ by tribe but often involve spiritual beliefs, herbal medicine, and multigenerational care. Reclaiming traditional birthing practices is a growing movement within many communities.

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### SOUTH AMERICA

- **Quechua (Peru/Bolivia):** Pregnancy is tied to Pachamama (Mother Earth). Women may give birth squatting or kneeling. Traditional midwives are often the primary birth attendants.
- **Mapuche (Chile/Argentina):** Birth is a community event, involving spiritual rituals. Herbal medicine is frequently used.



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### EUROPE

- **Irish Travelers:** May have mistrust of formal medical systems due to discrimination. The extended family plays a major role in child-rearing. Privacy and respect are essential.
  - **Roma (Romani):** Postpartum care includes a period of separation due to beliefs about purity. Women are supported by female kin during this time.
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### MIDDLE EAST

- **Arab cultures:** Modesty and family involvement are central. Labor support from women relatives is common. Religious customs like prayer or Quran recitation may be practiced.
  - **Persian (Iran):** Hospitality and family closeness are emphasized. Foods considered "hot" or "cold" in nature may be used to restore balance postpartum.
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### PACIFIC ISLANDS/OCEANIA

- **Māori (New Zealand):** Pregnancy and childbirth are seen as tapu (sacred). The whenua (placenta) is often buried to honor the land and ancestry.
- **Samoan:** Family and communal support are central. Birth may take place at home, attended by female elders. Postpartum rest and nutrition are prioritized.
- **Aboriginal Australian:** Birthing on country (ancestral land) is significant. Elders may pass on knowledge, and connection to land and spirit is deeply honored.

