



How Doula Adriana Lozada Guides Parents to Their Own Ideal Birth

After giving birth to her daughter changed her life, she left a thriving media career to support parents on their pre- and postnatal odysseys. Adriana shares practical wisdom and useful advice on Birthful, her popular podcast, where she talks to health experts and welcomes parents to share their personal birth stories. Ultimately, she wants her clients and all parents to trust their intuition and center their needs in the birthing process.

Adriana Lozada:

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Alicia Menendez:

Adriana Lozada is, like a lot of us, a type-A mover and shaker. She was working in media at the height of the internet boom, and then the internet bubble burst. Her home country, Venezuela, began to unravel, and soon after Adriana got married, had a baby, and that birth changed everything. It made Adriana question everything about the way we approach birth. Now, Adriana is an advanced birth doula, a fierce advocate for parents on their pre and postnatal journeys, and the host of the incredible podcast, Birthful. I wish I had had this conversation with Adriana before I had both of my daughters, because she articulates things that I couldn't about how to advocate for yourself during your pregnancy, your birth, and those first few weeks after, when your world has been turned absolutely upside down.

Adriana, the first line of your official bio is, "Adriana's life can be defined as before and after being pregnant with her daughter, Anika. Who were you before you got pregnant with your daughter?"

Lozada: Oh, I was a total type A, super, just go get it, slay dragons before breakfast, that type, right?

Menendez: Totally familiar. Yes.

Lozada: And the thing was that I was very fortunate, extremely lucky throughout my life to have a lot of serendipity and a lot of support from my parents, communities, and just the universe in general, of really allowing me to take bold leaps and not fail. So, that just kept increasing my, "I can do anything, I can do anything," and then I had a child and that was definitely the most humbling experience ever. Like most of us are, I was under the misguided idea that you can apply the same skills that you apply to achieving in life to parenting, and to birthing, and to being a mother, and you can't. Those are not the skills you need.

And of course, I was like all cocky, like, "I've got this. I've got everything in my life." And boy, yeah, did that hit hard.

Menendez: What was it about giving birth specifically that inspired you to want to help others on their maternity journeys?

Lozada: When I got pregnant, I knew very little about... It was more like a checklist thing. I knew to have a kid, great. And I went into it with my journalistic point of view and started reading everything, all the information I could get, and gobbling it up, and you know, I've got this. The more I read, the more I learned, the angrier I got of how the person who's doing all the work, the person who's growing this child, the person who's at the core of this experience is kind of an afterthought. And in some cases, seen as a vessel to bringing forth this life. And how much of your agency is taken away from you.

Menendez: I want to stop you there, because I, having now carried two pregnancies, totally know what you mean. But for someone who's listening, who hasn't yet had the experience of being pregnant, can you describe a way in which we take that agency away from the person who's carrying the child?

Lozada: First off, it's culturally you become fair game to everybody. Because you're pregnant, it's like, "Now you are this amazing person that belongs to everybody." In the street people stop and touch your belly, or they give you unsolicited advice about what you should do, or if you share your wishes of what you want to do, then you get judged at every step of the way. So, there's that first elimination of agency, and then pregnancy itself just... The physiological process of how things change in your body, you enter a more vulnerable state where words have even more power, and if somebody tells you, "Oh, it seems your baby is big," that's gonna bring fear, and it's gonna hit your core.

If somebody told you whatever, your butt's big, you'd be like, "Oh, whatever. You don't know what you're talking about," before being pregnant. But in that moment, you're so vulnerable. So, you're vulnerable, your agency is taken away from you, and the system is also set up in a very hierarchical structure, where we've taken a process that again, it's physiological. It's not medical. Nothing is wrong with you. But we have made it a medical situation. We've pathologized it. And therefore, somebody else needs to intervene and tell you how to do it.

Menendez: You're an advanced birth doula, an eco-maternity consultant, which I had to Google, a postpartum educator and a child sleep consultant. How do you describe what a birth doula does?

Lozada: The basic definition of a doula is a person who provides informational, physical, and emotional support throughout labor. We also do some prenatal, some postpartum meetings, but that's a really boring definition. How I define it is more I am there to help you be prepared for birth and whatever the perinatal process sends your way. And my goal is for you to have a satisfying birth experience as you define it. A lot of people think that doulas are there only for unmedicated births and that's not true. I've supported anything from home births to planned cesarean sections. That's not the point. The point of a doula is to have somebody who's holding space for you and checking in, like we got together ahead of time, Alicia, and I asked you, "How do you want your birth to be? What's important to you? How do you want to feel during birth?" Okay, then let's figure out how to make sure you feel that way regardless of how this baby wants to show up.

What really matters is the process and how you experience it, because that's gonna stick with you forever, your whole life, until you're on your deathbed.

Menendez: Yes. It is probably the story you will tell most frequently over the course of your life. It is what most stood out to me about being pregnant the first time, which was that there was so much preparation for the birth and so little preparation for the postpartum period, both physically and psychologically. Both in terms of what people around me were sort of coaching me, telling me, and then also my own interest. I was so, so focused on the birth that it didn't occur to me that I would have 18-plus years to care for someone else.

Lozada: It is so tough, and that has to do one, it goes back to what we're talking about agency, and what's important here? What's important is that a baby is born healthy. The postpartum period of how you recover, eh, I'll see you in six weeks. Right? And not understanding that it's all connected. How you birth will impact how you parent, how you go through that postpartum, and how you're treated during your pregnancy impacts how you were treated during birth.

So, I have a postpartum preparation course. I'm not a postpartum doula, because I don't want to be in your house and I... The babies are beautiful, they're gorgeous, they're great. I'm not in love with the babies, I'm in love with the person that gave birth. The power, the awe, the fierceness, the honor of being there to witness that and tell them, "I see you. I see what you did. I see how you rocked this."

Menendez: I didn't have a doula, because my mom is an RN and she was gonna be the nurse with me and I didn't want an entourage, but my doctor, I realized that part of the reason I felt so fondly towards him is because he was the last person who cared about me. The shift to the... The radical shift in everyone to the baby. I was like, "Oh, you're the last person who's sitting here with me, worried about me, who's coming in to check in on me." That moment becomes in some ways the door to the rest of your life, right? Where it's like, "Okay, and now it's about somebody else forever."

Lozada: And why it's so important that we remember to take care of ourselves and actually put ourselves up, because at the end of the day, yes, it's about somebody else forever. However, if you are not there, if you are drained, if you're resourced out, you cannot take care of that little person who needs you for everything. In fact, you're their nervous system. Truthfully, those first three months are key. One of the things that we say often in the Birthful Podcast is that you need to be selfish, because you'll never be completely selfish if you're a mother, if you're taking care of a baby, but it goes back to that putting the oxygen mask on you first. And trying to see if you can be instead of a 50/50, be a 51 you, 49% baby, because it's a marathon. It's not a sprint.

Ad: *Let's Go Together is a new podcast from the experts at Travel & Leisure, celebrating travel for everyone. Each week, host Kellee Edwards, the award-winning travel expert, explores how travel can be transformative, enriching, and inspirational even in the face of adversity. From a quadriplegic who climbed Machu Picchu, to the first documented Black woman to visit every country, and what it's like to travel the world as a Latina and the daughter of immigrants, Kelly talks a bolder, more inclusive look at travel. Listen each week as these amazing guests share their unique and inspiring travel experiences from around the world. Subscribe, listen, and enjoy Let's Go Together on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Stitcher, wherever you find your favorite podcasts. New episodes are published every Wednesday. When everyone travels, everyone benefits, so Let's Go Together!*

- Menendez: You've been sharing your knowledge on Birthful Podcast that has almost 300 episodes, millions of downloads. We are podcast play cousins. Congrats on bringing Birthful to Lantigua Williams & Co. Why did you start the podcast?
- Lozada: The short answer is my husband said, "You should do a podcast. You have the knowledge. You have the information." Yeah. It was just very much of him pushing me towards it and it was ridiculous that I hadn't done it before. I had done radio in my late twenties, so this medium was very comfortable for me, and then I had that communications background and I have all the doula and birth and postpartum knowledge, all the perinatal knowledge, but from a point of view where as a doula, that's another magical thing about doulas. I don't do anything medical, so that's... Those aren't my tools. I have the luxury of not doing anything medical, so I can just focus on you.
- And so, the podcast is born because I wanted to tell people, share with them, how much power and fierceness they have in them, and to help them have satisfying birth experiences as they define it, and almost be like your weekly dose of, "I can do this." Of confidence. When everybody else is taking away your agency, I want to give it back to you, and I want to dismantle the myths from the actual facts. And I want you to own your process, because if you don't own this process, if you don't show up for your birth, your birth is just gonna happen and you're gonna feel it happen to you, and that's the worst thing that can happen.
- Menendez: What is a number one thing you hear from those you work with? What's the number one thing that is on the mind of would-be parents as they meet with you for the first time?
- Lozada: What I hear more often from them is, especially the partners, because we do meetings... I'm there to support not just the birthing person, but also the partner, and almost more support to them as they support their loved ones during the birth. So, how much they didn't know they needed to know, and how much they didn't know they could ask for. Oh, you mean I can say no? Yeah, you can say no. You have absolute ownership of this process. This is your body, your baby, your spouse or your partner, your loved one. Everybody around you suggests. I know the language that they use doesn't seem like they're suggesting things. It's more like my doctor, my midwife won't let me this, or they won't let me go past however many weeks, and it's about turning that around, because you can't parent when you're being treated as a child.
- So, I think it's that reflection of seeing somebody see them differently and tell them what's possible, and opening up the curiosity into what they can have this process be. Not just having a baby, but actually a life-transforming event. I think my favorite part of birth is that moment when the birthing person, when everything finishes, however they got there, and they realize what they've done.
- Menendez: It's awesome.
- Lozada: It's the best and they kind of open their eyes and then they look for validation, right? They usually turn to their partner if they have one, and it's kind of like, "Did you see what I did?" Right? Did you see this? Because it takes you to your core, right? It's the... Oh my gosh.
- Menendez: We are talking more now about Black maternal health, maternal health outcomes in communities of color. It's certainly not a new conversation, but I think the amount of airtime that it's getting is new. What does your doula wisdom attribute that gap in rates to?

Lozada: So, we've known that gap for years. We started collecting statistics and I think it's been in the past three, four, five years where those statistics have really come out and the conversation has been growing. But always that conversation was around how race was where the inequity lied, and that it was a blaming of Black bodies. "Oh, it's because of epigenetics, or it's because of generational oppression, or it's because of Black people have higher rates of asthma, or diabetes, or..." Now, the conversation has really shifted and really from... It's one of those things that 2020 has exploded into bringing clarity and honesty, and from a place of being brave to the conversation that it is not race that is the problem, it's the systemic racism in the United States.

It was Dr. Joia Crear-Perry, who's the founder of the Black Birth Equity Collaborative, and she said race isn't a risk factor in maternal health. Racism is.

Menendez: You talk a lot about a joyful and satisfying birth and a joyful and satisfying postpartum experience, so I feel like I sort of have your take on a joyful birth, which is to experience it as you define it, right? To set up at the outset what it is you want to get from it. How do you set up those expectations for the postpartum period?

Lozada: So, the first thing you do is you have realistic expectations about the postpartum period, and that's what we don't have. We think it's gonna be like, "Oh, pop this baby out, and then just get my body back." And first of all, you'll never get your body back, because the topography has changed. Even if you get back to your pre-pregnancy weight, things are gonna be different, and that's like.. mucha honra, right? Thank goodness, because you went through a thing. You need a tectonic plate shift to represent a physical representation of the shifts that have gone on inside you.

For the first few weeks, you are not gonna be able to do much more than just feed your baby, care for your baby, get sleep, and get some good nutrition, and hopefully have some community support. So, if there was one thing I would like for us to have, I guess two things. Realistic expectation of honoring that recovery and having proper long-term paid family leave, so that you can take a time off, because there's no sense of you knowing that you need to take care of yourself when you're expected to go back to work at two weeks, when you're expected to do it all on your own, because we live so far away from family, or if you wanted to hire professionals, daycare is so intensely expensive. As a society, we don't properly value those tender weeks of a new family, and then we wonder why our society is so messed up.

Menendez: I was on high alert for postpartum because of my history with depression and anxiety, and I was very lucky that I did not experience it, but I definitely had baby blues, and I think most of my baby blues were the fact that I was just really tired. All the time. Because I was nursing. All the time. And I didn't understand how to eat for the fact that I was producing all of this milk for another person, like the fact that you're somebody else's food source is like a real hard thing to wrap your mind around.

Lozada: And you're their food source, and their nervous system, and they're everything else, and their comfort, and their soothing. They're not just there to eat and you're over... You think you stop carrying this baby, but you don't. And I feel like I sound like a broken record, but the problem is systemic. It's systemic, but because we are... We culturally value individualism so much, we take it on as a personal failure, and that's the problem. It is ridiculous to think that you could succeed at breastfeeding without support, without

knowledge, without... Just by your lonesome, and within our societal structures that require you to also go to work.

I mean, if you had 24/7 the opportunity to you, by yourself, just breastfeed and not have to do anything else, then yeah, individually you could do it. You wouldn't need all the ton of information and support. However, we don't have that. And so, the pressure compounds when we, again, being individualistic, think it is our responsibility to do it alone and don't ask for help.

Menendez: How can you best show up for someone who's just welcomed a baby? However they've welcomed that baby.

Lozada: So, how you can best show up is to connect with them two, three weeks before the baby showed up, and sit down with them and say, "Hey, do you have a postpartum plan?" And I have... Find a postpartum plan, or on my website I have a freebie postpartum plan for anybody, which is what we use in the course. And so, have your postpartum plan. That'll help you narrow down all the things that are gonna change, especially if this person's a first time parent, right? Narrow down all the things that are gonna change and then have on paper, and if you have a partner, both of you sit down and make sure you're on the same page in terms of what's gonna happen every step of the way. And a good postpartum plan is gonna figure out what you need in terms of what the baby's gonna need, what your household needs are gonna be, what your recovery needs are gonna be, what your emotional needs are gonna be, and start getting resources for all that, and phone numbers if you need, or plans.

And in terms of what you need for yourself to be an individual. So, one of the things that you can do is write down a list of things that need to happen, right? That needs to be done, on your fridge, and when somebody comes in and says, "Oh, how can I help?" You go, "There's a list on the fridge. Pick one or two."

Menendez: Okay. I'm a year out and I'm still gonna do that, because that's such a good... Not that anybody's coming to my house in the middle of COVID, but I still love it.

Lozada: Because it's like then they'll see how many there are and go like, "Oh, let me grab more than one." And it also helps mediate, because you might be really bad at saying, "Hey, can you do my dishes? Can you wash my laundry?" But if it's on the list and they prefer washing dishes over doing laundry, then they can pick that one.

Menendez: I feel like this is actually a very applicable thing to something as happy as welcoming a baby. I also feel like it probably applies really well to a period of grief, to in general knowing how to show up.

Lozada: All big transitions where we need help. We need our communities to come together. We need that village support.

Menendez: Okay. I know. You know what I now want? Now what I want is I want a three-way crossover between How to Talk to [Mamá & Papi] About Anything, Birthful, and Latina to Latina, because this is a super hard conversation to have within our families uniquely, culturally. I mean, my family wanted to come over rolling 10 deep, like I'd been home for two days with the baby and it was like, "No, this is not a party. This is quiet time with the baby."

Lozada: And I wish we could first of all bring back the knowledge that we've lost in terms of cuarentena practices, for example, where it was about taking care of the mother as they took care of the baby. Right? And it was 40 days of people feeding you, holding baby so you could shower, so you can sleep, letting whatever you needed. That, as opposed to getting in those fixes and having everybody and their cousin come in. I think we let people, because we want to be nice, because of how we've been socialized, because culturally all the things, we want to be nice to people. And then we need to... This is a time where we need to be selfish. I'm back to that 51% 49%. So, that's what selfishness looks like.

But you're doing it for yourself, too. Changing behavior in yourself, so that you're not a doormat.

Menendez: I imagine as a doula and a postpartum educator, people's stories about trying to get pregnant or trying to become parents also come pouring out, so what do you tell those who are struggling with infertility or whose path to parent is not as they imagined it?

Lozada: I hold a very deep... They hold a very deep place in my heart because of how difficult that journey is and also how little we talk about it. And a fertility journey usually goes hand in hand with losses, and those rightly so are heartbreaking, but that's something we're not talking about enough in our communities, because it's hard. It's painful. It's about... As a doula, one of the things that I do is I've been trained and have practiced over and over again to be comfortable being in uncomfortable spaces. You know, holding you while you cry because you lost your baby. And knowing that I can't fix it. You can't fix it. It's just grief. It's sorrow. It's horrible. And let's just sit here and be together with you in that space.

And I think we all need to open ourselves up to being in uncomfortable situations, because it's just... It's not that it's difficult, per se, it's just you don't have competency being uncomfortable. I stumbled into being a doula, right? I had the idea of wanting to change things for... I was so angry with what I was seeing the system was all about when I was pregnant, and then I wanted to do a great big campaign, like the Tobacco Truth campaign, but relating to the perinatal system. Like we need that. I think finally we're getting to that. Not as organized, but we're getting there. More grassroots.

But I had a newborn and I was far from my home, and I had just moved to Rochester, and my family weren't around, and my friends weren't around, and I was going through postpartum depression, like all the things. But in my heart, I still wanted to do what I could to help at least one family at a time. That's why I became a doula. What doula work has done for me, it's allowed me to be comfortable being in those uncomfortable spaces. It's allowed me to be honest about the deep topics, about uplifting others and connecting at a different level.

Menendez: Adriana, thank you so much. This was so wonderful.

Lozada: Thank you so much. It was a pleasure being here.

Menendez: Thanks for joining us. Latina to Latina is executive produced and owned by Juleyka Lantigua-Williams and me, Alicia Menendez. Paulina Velasco is our senior producer. Virginia Lora is our managing producer. Cedric Wilson is our lead producer. Carolina Rodriguez mixed this episode. Production help from Kat Hernandez. Manuela Bedoya is our social media editor. We love hearing from you. Email us at hola@latinatolatina.com and remember to subscribe or follow us on RadioPublic, Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, Latina to Latina: How Doula Adriana Lozada Guides Parents to Their Own Ideal Birth

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