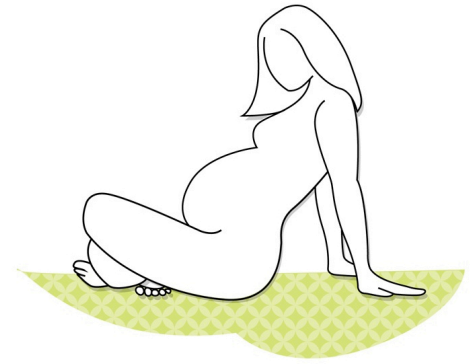


# BIRTH, GADGETS, AND GIZMOS – A SHORT PRIMER FOR USING YOUR PHONE DURING LABOR



by **Julie Dubrouillet**, certified labor support doula, childbirth and lactation educator and author of *Deliver! A Concise Guide to Helping the Woman You Love Through Labor*

*Thinking of tweeting, texting, or otherwise getting on your gadgets during labor? – here's Julie's take:*

The rules for using smartphones, laptops, or any other kinds of mobile technology during labor and birth are pretty much the same as for our regular lives – you need to fit them into the experience, not build the experience around them.

Certainly, digital devices can be wonderful tools that a mom and her birth team can use to help her relax, record some of the highlights of the baby's arrival, and share the good news. But technology can just as easily get in the way, stopping the person using it (and that's typically not the laboring mom!) from being present at an important moment and disconnecting him or her from the other people in the room, which is the opposite of helpful and supportive.

## **Different strokes, different folks**

Here's the thing: I've seen women who want friends and family frequently updated so they don't have to worry about them worrying – to the point that *they're* texting and tweeting etc. more than their partners. I've also worked with couples that tell family and friends to expect to hear nothing until well after the baby is born. Both approaches can work. What counts here is figuring out what makes the laboring mom most comfortable – and then seeing that her wishes get honored.

## **Bottom line: talk about it**

The only way figure out what will work is to talk about the issue beforehand. A mom-to-be might worry that her partner won't be there for her if he's texting his (of course, it could be her) way through the birth, or that he'll try to squeeze in work between contractions when she really needs his support. It's important to get those concerns out on the table, so her birth supporter understands what's being asked of him and so he can commit to what they jointly agree is reasonable up front. So that's your #1 thing to agree on: knowing how you both like to use phones, tablets, laptops, and cameras, **how are you going to make sure that none of these things will start running the show?**

The other main thing to discuss is **how and when you plan to keep family and friends updated.** Will you tell people when you go into labor, or will you wait until the baby is born? Will you use

phone calls, emails, or texts – and how often? Once the baby is born, who should get a personal call before the news is posted to Facebook for a more general audience of friends and acquaintances? Talking about, and then settling on, a plan will help keep misunderstandings to a minimum.

### The in-room tech traffic lights:

Here's another way to think of technology in the delivery room, that reflects my experience in attending hundreds of births – most of them in tech-obsessed Silicon Valley. It's a set of 'traffic lights' that can warn you that your technology might be taking over:

#### Green technology: "All Good"

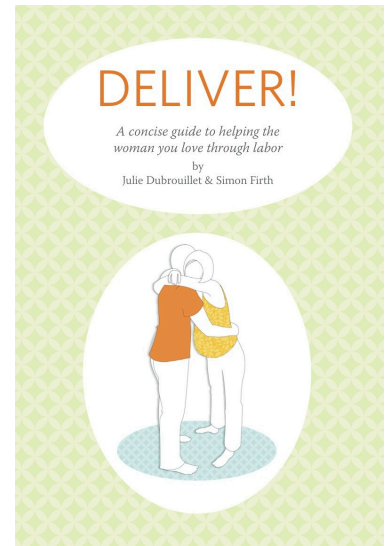
- Listening to music that will help her relax.
- Watching a distracting, low-stress movie.
- Using an App to time contractions.
- Listening to guided meditations to help reduce stress.
- Partner watching movies with headphones if mom is sleeping.

#### Yellow technology: "Be Careful"

- Updates on mom, labor, & baby via text, phone, email, & social media.
- Photo sharing - make sure photos are mom-approved before they are sent.
- Quick alert to work to say you won't be in.

#### Red technology: "Warning"

- Surfing the web.
- Repeatedly looking at or updating Facebook.
- Responding to everyone's texts.
- Doing work remotely.
- Taking photos if mom has asked you not to.



Look for lots more on how to be a great labor supporter in Julie's book:

**Deliver! A Concise Guide to Helping the Woman You Love Through Labor**

– available at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) –

If a mom is awake and her birth partner really needs to do one of the "Red" activities, her partner needs to let her know what the activity is and how long it will take, and then ask her if this is a good time.

**If you are the birth partner, here's the deal:** Although birth has a lot of dramatic moments, there are usually a lot of long, kinda boring stretches too, and it can be tempting to escape into your smartphone or computer. Try to remember that the mom can't do the same, especially as her labor becomes more intense. It's really, really important for her that her partner stays mentally and emotionally present with her throughout.

**About Julie:** Julie Dubrouillet is a certified labor support doula, childbirth and lactation educator, author, and trainer of childbirth educators. The mother of two children, she is also a pre-natal Health Education Specialist at the Palo Alto Medical Foundation in Palo Alto, CA.