



Course Syllabus

# **BIRTH DOULA TRAINING**

Childbirth International

# Introduction

Congratulations on deciding to train as a Birth Doula. This exciting journey is life-changing for many, and we hope it will be for you. Childbirth International's (CBI) birth doula training program provides everything you need to become a certified birth doula. Our support is wide-ranging, with an in-depth curriculum, worldwide trainer network, private student group, and flexible learning environment. Partner with us while learning the skills and knowledge to help families welcome their babies.

Your support as a birth doula will be invaluable to the families you work with as you help them prepare for their baby and navigate unexpected events. You'll be part of the global movement to improve birth and honor the rights of every pregnant and birthing individual. You'll be making a real difference in people's lives while making a living at something you're passionate about.

# Learning Flexibility

All Childbirth International courses are carried out through flexible learning. This enables you to study wherever - and whenever - you like! After you register for your course, you will receive an emailed invoice and an important separate email with a link to complete your registration as a student. Once you click on that link and confirm your registration as a student, you will have immediate access to your course materials and can get started right away.

Your course materials are available through our student website (<https://cbilearning.com>). This is where you will find all the course modules, assignments, online tests, and reflective evaluations that are needed for certification.

Your course has no time limit. You can work through the materials and graduate within a few months, take your time, or take a break as other priorities come up!

If you choose the “printed manuals” option, your printed course materials will be ordered once your order has been processed. Depending on where you are, they’ll arrive via FedEx between 5-15 business days. The printed manuals are a copy of the online material and offer you another way to study the course curriculum.

Within a couple of days of your registration, you'll be assigned a trainer and receive a welcome and introductory email to begin the journey of getting to know each other. Your trainer follows you through your course, providing feedback for your assignments and evaluations, and they are there to encourage, motivate, and support you.

After you graduate, a certificate will be available for download through the student website. You will also continue to have access to the course content and any updates through the student portal.

# Course Content

Your course is divided into a series of modules. The modules are made up of units of related topics. The modules in the Birth Doula course are:

- Communication Skills
- Pregnancy and Birth Anatomy and Physiology
- Birth Doula Skills
- Business of Birth
- Safety and Infection Prevention and Control

As you work through each unit, you will find the knowledge, understanding, and skills laid out at the beginning. Each unit has activities and online readings to develop further perspectives. At the end of each unit is a summary task that draws together your learning and helps you to relate this to your own work.

## Communication Skills (60 hours)

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Communication skills are essential for working with clients and their families, healthcare providers, and peers. The communication module is made up of seven units:

- Effective communication
- Language and communication
- Active listening skills
- Evidence-informed care and informed choice
- Grief and loss
- Reflective practice and debriefing
- Diversity and cultural safety
- Client privacy and confidentiality

### Effective Communication

Estimated time to complete: 9 hours

We will look at the essential components of communication and the things that need to be in place to foster better communication: the important concepts of "owning our feelings" and "walking our talk." We will consider the value of striving for open and honest communication, both to be more effective and to foster trust and commitment in our personal and professional relationships. We'll then move on to examine communication without words - non-verbal communication, and the power it holds even when we're not aware of it. We will look at the main obstacles to good communication - the things that trip us up and cause us to get our wires crossed.

Finally, we'll start exploring strategies for effective communication, including responding with empathy instead of sympathy and asking open questions. Building on this introduction, we'll examine other communication skills in later units.

## Topics Covered

- Identifying your communication skills
- Components of communication
- Prerequisites for effective communication
- Open and honest communication
- Non-verbal communication
- Barriers to communication
- Empathy and sympathy
- Open and closed questions

## Language and Communication

Estimated time to complete: 6 hours

In this unit, we will consider the effect of language on the perception and understanding of birth and the postpartum experience. The way people perceive language affects how they understand concepts, whether they are the speaker/writer or the listener/reader. As birth professionals, our confidence in using explicit language, our body language, and our understanding of the cultural context of language, all

affect the messages we send, and can also affect the way we present "reality" to our clients.

We'll discuss all these influences, and look at how we, as professionals, can choose language that reinforces the message we want to convey. Through our use of language, we can present birth as either a scary, overwhelming thing or something that a person has control over and an inherent ability to do with power and dignity. Altering our language can have a significant impact on how effectively we communicate.

## Topics Covered

- The power of language
- Risk-based and benefits-based language
- Explicit language
- Body language
- Language and culture
- Appropriate language
- Advice, recommendations, and support

## Active Listening Skills

Estimated time to complete: 7 hours

In this unit, we will look at the barriers to effective listening, including lack of awareness of listening skills, assumptions, and judgment, our own personal baggage, filling the space, misinterpreting communication, distraction, and noise. We'll explore techniques for active listening that you can use with clients and with anyone and everyone else in your life, including reflective listening, paraphrasing, using silence, and prompts. We'll also look at the four steps to developing these active listening skills.

## Topics Covered

- Why listen?
- Barriers to effective listening
- Active listening skills
- Paraphrasing
- Using silence
- Verbal and non-verbal prompts

## Evidence-Informed Care and Informed Choice

Estimated time to complete: 5 hours

As birth and lactation professionals, we have a responsibility to ensure we understand which aspects of the care offered to our clients are evidence-informed, and which are not. Further, we need to have the skills to communicate this information in an appropriately balanced and non-threatening way. In this unit, we identify sources of information that can assist in making informed choices and examine strategies for communicating that information to our clients.

## Topics Covered

- What is evidence-informed care?
- Informed choice versus informed consent
- Promoting informed choice
- Understanding and presenting medical research

## Grief and Loss

Estimated time to complete: 6 hours

Supporting families through loss and grief is one of the most challenging areas of working as a birth and lactation professional. This is one area that students and

experienced practitioners alike often dread. In this unit, we'll explore theories of grief to give you an overview of the ways the grief process is understood, and we'll look in some detail at individual forms of loss, such as miscarriage, stillbirth, illness, or fertility problems. We'll examine how families experience such losses, and the issues they may face in the aftermath. We'll also look at how you can support clients in maintaining control over their decisions and making their experience an empowering one, before, during, and after a loss, even if their experience is one they would never have chosen. Finally, we'll talk about the importance of looking after ourselves during such a time.

## Topics Covered

- Theories of grief
- Miscarriage
- Stillbirth and neonatal death
- Disability or illness in a child
- Infertility and subfertility
- Termination of pregnancy
- Other forms of grief and loss
- Gender and grief
- Providing support for grieving families
- Caring for yourself following grief

## Reflective Practice and Debriefing

Estimated time to complete: 8 hours

In this unit, we will look closely at what reflective practice is all about, what the benefits are of using it, and we'll explore several different methods of using reflection. The first step in making a difference in our client's experiences, and in the world of birth and parenting, is to start within, with our own ability to reflect. The skills you will



learn in this unit will also be used to complete the assignment for the communications unit - your reflective practice case studies.

## Topics Covered

- What is reflective practice?
- Why reflect?
- Recount versus reflection
- Using a reflective practice framework
- Writing a reflective journal

## Diversity and Cultural Safety

Estimated time to complete: 11 hours

In this unit, we will cover several topics that relate to ethics and professionalism. We explore how culture might impact our clients and consider how it can influence health disparities in marginalized and vulnerable groups. We will also look at the concept of cultural safety and how power balances and systemic structures influence the healthcare that an individual receives. Finally, we will consider the components of trauma-informed care and how it impacts your work as a birth professional.

## Topics Covered

- Ethics and morals
- Evaluating our values and biases
- Ethics and our culture
- Embracing difference
- Health disparities
- Inherent bias and discrimination
- Cultural awareness, competency, humility, and safety

## Client Privacy and Confidentiality

Estimated time to complete: 2 hours

This unit explores issues related to client confidentiality and, specifically, the legal requirements in the United States for protecting client information. Even if you are not in the United States, it is important to understand the issues related to confidentiality and the importance of respecting your client's right to privacy.

### Topics Covered

- Client confidentiality and privacy
- Understanding HIPAA
- Who is affected by HIPAA?
- Information protected by HIPAA
- HIPAA requirements
- HIPAA privacy rule
- Risk analysis

### Assignments and Assessments

Estimated time to complete: 6 hours

During the module, you will participate in three discussion forums with your peers. There are also a number of reflective self-directed activities throughout the module, and external readings and videos to enable you to explore different perspectives.

The Communication module will be assessed through three assignments that ask you to reflect on different aspects of communication. Each assignment is submitted through the student learning website. Your trainer reviews your assignments and provides you with feedback.

# Physiology and Anatomy of Pregnancy, Labor, and Birth (67 hours)

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In your work as a birth doula, you will need to have a strong understanding of the anatomy and physiology of pregnancy and birth, together with an understanding of conditions and interventions that impact maternal and infant outcomes.

The physiology module is made up of:

- Physiology in pregnancy
- Physiology in labor and birth
- Prenatal testing and screening
- Pain in labor
- Labor interventions, policies, and procedures
- Cesarean and vaginal birth after cesarean
- Physiology after the birth
- Health, nutrition, and exercise
- Introduction to lactation

## Physiology in Pregnancy

Estimated time to complete: 6 hours

Having a sound understanding of the physiological processes that surround pregnancy and childbirth is imperative for both childbirth educators and labor supporters. It will enable you to comprehend better when abnormal events occur and develop your skills in assisting clients to care for themselves during the childbearing year. During this unit, you will cover the physiology of pregnancy. You will develop a thorough understanding of the development of the fetus from conception through to term, reproductive anatomy, and the changes that occur during pregnancy.

## Topics Covered

- The female pelvis
- Female reproductive organs
- Menstruation & conception
- Normal fetal development
- Development of the placenta
- Changes during pregnancy

## Physiology in Labor and Birth

Estimated time to complete: 8 hours

Understanding the physiology of labor and birth is fundamental as part of the knowledge base of childbirth educators and labor supporters. Recognizing the stages of labor, responses to labor and the different patterns that labor can take all help you to communicate and support your clients effectively. During this unit, you will cover the physiology of labor and birth. You will develop a thorough understanding of the processes and mechanisms of labor.

## Topics Covered

- Initiation of labor
- Stages of labor
- Indicators of progress
- Emotional responses to labor
- Variations of physiological labor and birth
- The baby during labor

## Prenatal Testing and Screening

Estimated time to complete: 2 hours

Prenatal tests have quickly become a routine procedure for pregnant women with few questioning the tests themselves. In this unit, we will discuss the various tests available and explore the effectiveness, accuracy, and risks associated with each of them. We will also consider the impact on families who choose to have prenatal tests and identify some of the ethical issues relevant to this topic.

### **Topics Covered**

- The implications of testing
- Screening tests
- Diagnostic tests
- Ultrasound scanning
- Ethical issues with testing & screening

## **Pain in Labor**

Estimated time to complete: 5 hours

For many, the fear of pain during labor is their major concern throughout their pregnancy. Understanding why pain is experienced during labor, the options available for managing the pain, and the benefits and disadvantages of each option, is important if you are to help your clients be truly informed during labor. During this unit, we will explore the concept of pain itself and develop a deeper understanding of the options available. We will also discuss in detail the pharmacology of each pain relief method available in the hospital environment and learn how they provide pain relief in the body.

### **Topics Covered**

- Understanding pain
- The physiology of labor pain
- Attitudes to pain
- Management options for pain relief in labor
- Non-pharmacological pain relief options

- Pharmaceutical pain relief options

## Labor Interventions, Policies, and Procedures

Estimated time to complete: 12 hours

During this unit, we will consider the common interventions that people experience during labor, together with the policies, procedures, and standard routines found in healthcare settings that can impact your clients. We will explore the reasons for routine procedures and the potential consequences of these. We will also discuss alternatives to routine procedures.

### Topics Covered

- Active and expectant management
- Expected due dates
- Vaginal examinations in pregnancy
- Induction of labor
- Electronic fetal monitoring
- Time limits during labor
- Augmentation of labor
- Intravenous fluids
- Vaginal examinations during labor
- Eating & drinking during labor
- Hospital gowns
- Limiting mobility
- Breathing and pushing techniques
- Episiotomy
- Third stage management

- Separation of parent & baby
- Prophylactic eye ointment
- Vitamin K administration

## Cesarean and Vaginal Birth After Cesarean

Estimated time to complete: 4 hours

Cesarean rates continue to increase in most countries around the world despite the risks to both parent and baby. During this unit, we will consider the reasons for the increasing cesarean rate and possible indications for cesarean birth. We will also explore the consequences of cesarean and the alternatives available. We will look at vaginal birth after cesarean (VBAC), the true risks and benefits, and under what circumstances a VBAC may not be available.

### Topics Covered

- Indications for cesarean birth
- Planned cesarean versus elective
- Benefits and disadvantages of cesareans
- Pain relief options for cesareans
- Understanding the procedure of cesarean
- Recovery after a cesarean
- VBAC & uterine rupture

## Physiology of the New Parent

Estimated Time to Complete: 3 hours

During this unit, we will explore the normal physiology of the early postpartum period - the first few weeks after the birth of a baby. We will discuss the events that are normal for this period, the physical recovery and the emotional changes that typically occur. We will also learn about the complex process of respiration in the neonate as the baby is born.

## Topics Covered

- Physiological changes in the new parent
- Recovery after a cesarean
- Breast/chestfeeding after a cesarean

## Psychological Changes in the Postpartum Period

Estimated time to complete: 3 hours

During the early postpartum period, new parents may go through a variety of emotional changes. This is partly due to fluctuations in their hormone levels, together with the enormous lifestyle changes and responsibility that having a new baby brings.

Many people have concerns over how they will manage with a baby if they have older children. It is common for them to feel unsure of whether they will have the same amount of love for the new baby as they have for their older child. In most cases, these concerns diminish after the baby is born, but dealing with the logistics of caring for two children and having a desire to make sure the older sibling does not miss out on attention from the parents because a new baby has arrived can be an ongoing concern for many months. It is not surprising, given the many challenges a new parent faces, that their emotional well-being may suffer in the postpartum period.

There are several different types of postpartum mood and anxiety disorders that may be seen in the postpartum period - baby blues; postpartum depression or anxiety; postpartum psychosis; postpartum obsessive-compulsive disorder; postpartum panic disorder; and postpartum post-traumatic stress disorder. The baby blues are often considered a normal psychological response to the new demands of parenthood although it can be difficult to distinguish between a situation that is a normal response and one that becomes pathological as in the case of the beginning of postpartum depression.

## Topics Covered

- Baby blues
- Postpartum depression and anxiety
- Postpartum posttraumatic stress disorder



- Other postpartum mood disorders
- Identification of postpartum mood disorders
- Treatment for postpartum mood disorders

## **Adaptation of the Newborn**

Estimate time to complete: 3 hours

In this unit, we will explore the normal physiology and health of the baby in the early postpartum period. Just as it is important to understand the parent's physiological experience in the postpartum period, it is also important to understand the physiological adaptations the baby makes after birth, what physical patterns are normal in a newborn, and what problems can occur. When a baby is born a number of physiological changes take place that is nothing short of miraculous. The baby, who has completely relied on its parent until the birth for oxygen, nutrition, and protection must be able to function separately within minutes of being born. We will look at the main physiological changes that occur in the minutes after birth. A grounding in this information will help you to provide information so that parents can make informed decisions, and feel more confident about their early parenting experiences.

### **Topics Covered**

- Physiological changes and adaptations to life outside the womb
- Assessing the baby's well-being at birth
- Jaundice
- Newborn screening tests

## **Health and Nutrition**

Estimated time to complete: 5 hours

We put a lot of emphasis in Childbirth International courses on physiology because an individual's physical changes and adaptations both in pregnancy and in the postpartum period are so fundamental to a whole family's experience during the perinatal year. For similar reasons, we now turn to look at the role of healthy eating and exercise because nutrition and physical activity are cornerstones of someone's physical and emotional

well-being at any stage of life and perhaps most especially at a time of such great change as the birth of a baby. Nutrition also has an impact on the health of the baby, and can even influence the health of the rest of the family. When the person who cooks in a family eats more healthfully, the rest of the family are likely to follow!

While the specific links between diet and pregnancy outcome are not always simple and clear, many of the complications that can arise during pregnancy, such as diabetes, are made worse by poor nutrition and lack of exercise. Research shows benefits to adopting a healthy diet early in pregnancy. In her book *Safer Childbirth: A Critical History of Maternity Care*, epidemiologist Marjorie Tew explains that while reductions in maternal mortality rates are often said to be due to the fact that birth now takes place in hospital, it is actually more likely that these health improvements resulted from the fact that people began to have access to healthier foods and better living conditions.

We use the term "diet" to mean the range of foods eaten in a day or a week, not "diet" in the sense of a structured weight-loss plan. A person's activity level also ties into their physical and emotional health. In this unit, we'll look at what is "healthy eating," the nutrients that are the building blocks of nutrition, how diet affects the health of the parent and baby, and what happens when the diet or level of exercise may be contributing to ill health. We'll also look at the benefits of exercise and tips on getting active.

An understanding of these principles is helpful for you as a birth professional so that you can support clients who may lack basic information about healthy eating and its role in well-being, or who may feel overwhelmed at the idea of making changes in their diet or level of activity.

## Topics Covered

- Elements of healthy eating
- Overview of nutrients (protein, carbohydrates, fat, vitamins, minerals)
- Health and diet in pregnancy
- Teratogens and toxins
- Food and drink during lactation
- Exercise

## Diet-Related Issues

Estimated time to complete: 3 hours

Many illnesses and common complaints may be caused or affected by diet. In this section, we'll review some of the most common diet-related health problems.

### Topics Covered

- Diabetes
- Hypertension
- Pre-eclampsia
- Anemia
- Constipation
- Adolescents
- Vegetarian and vegan diets
- Weight and pregnancy
- Multiple pregnancies
- Food intolerances or sensitivity
- Lactose intolerance
- Gluten intolerance and celiac disease

## Introduction to Lactation

Estimated time to complete: 7 hours

As a provider of childbirth classes or postpartum support, you will often be called upon to provide information on feeding a baby human milk. You may also be asked to answer questions or provide support to people who are experiencing problems with lactation. During this introduction to lactation unit, we will discuss how the human body makes milk and how the process of lactation works. We will also explore the

more common problems that clients might experience and understand what causes these problems. Finally, we will consider other issues, such as pumping and weaning.

## Topics Covered

- Choosing lactation
- Why feed a baby human milk?
- Breast anatomy
- Lactation physiology
- Establishing lactation
- Lactation problems
- Other Issues (pumping, equipment, weaning)

## Assignments and Assessments

Estimated time to complete: 6 hours

During the module, you will participate complete eight online exams covering the material covered in this module. There are also a number of reflective self-directed activities throughout the module, and external readings and videos to enable you to explore different perspectives.

The Physiology module will be assessed through three case studies that ask you to reflect on different situations that you may encounter when working with birthing clients. The case studies are submitted through the student learning website. Your trainer reviews your case study responses and provides you with feedback.

## Birth Doula Skills (51 hours)

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This module covers the hands-on skills and practical aspects of working as a birth doula.

The Birth Dola Skills module is made up of:

- Getting started as a birth doula
- Working with clients prenatally
- Working with clients during labor
- Adapting to labor circumstances
- Working with clients postpartum

## Getting Started as a Birth Doula

Estimated time to complete: 4 hours

In the first unit of this module, we will look at the initial steps to becoming a doula - what your role entails, recognizing the benefits of birth doula support, building relationships and getting ready to work with your first client.

### Topics Covered

- History of birth support
- Roles and responsibilities
- Benefits of birth doulas
- Adverse Childhood Experiences
- Scope of practice
- Doula business models
- Initial client contact
- Preparing your birth bag

## Working With Clients Prenatally

Estimated time to complete: 5 hours

Working with clients prenatally is an important part of the doula role. It is during this period that you help them to identify their goals, their expectations of you, and determine the choices that will help them to have the birth they desire.

In this unit, we will look at the elements of the work you do as a doula when building a relationship with a client and setting your boundaries.

## Topics Covered

- Client meetings
- Debriefing
- Goals and expectations
- Birth plans
- Setting boundaries
- Meeting caregivers
- Documentation

## Working With Clients During Labor

Estimated time to complete: 6 hours

This unit will assist you in developing techniques that help you to support a client during labor and birth. We will look at positioning, massage techniques, breathing and relaxation methods. We will briefly overview complementary therapies. We will explore how you can communicate with a client on the options available to them for pain relief. We will also consider the challenges of being on call and how to create an optimal environment for birth. We will examine the difference in your role when at a home birth and how you can support partners and other family members. Finally, we will go through the documentation that might be useful at a birth.

## Topics Covered

- Positions
- Massage
- Pain relief
- Breathing and relaxation

- Complementary therapies
- Being on call
- Environment
- Working at home births
- Supporting partners and family members
- Documentation

## Adapting to Labor Circumstances

Estimated time to complete: 7 hours

Labor is often a time of enormous challenges, both physically and emotionally. However, for some, labor is more difficult than for most. In this section we will look at some of the more common causes of a challenging labor and how you, as a birth doula, can help a laboring client.

### Topics Covered

- Supporting a client through a long labor
- Precipitate (very fast) labors
- Malpositioning and supporting a client through a posterior labor
- Doula support with an epidural
- Induced and augmented labors
- Doula support during a cesarean
- Unplanned homebirth
- Emergency situations
- Managing conflict
- Managing disappointment

- Abuse

## Working With Clients Postpartum

Estimated time to complete: 3 hours

A birth doula typically provides 1-2 postpartum visits with a client but might be available for telephone or email consultation for the first few weeks after the birth. In this section, we will look at the services that you can provide during the postpartum period.

### Topics Covered

- Birth stories
- Birth debriefs
- Supporting partners, family, and friends
- Scheduling postpartum visits
- Support resources
- Infant care
- Perinatal mood and anxiety disorders
- Documentation for the postpartum period

## Assignments and Assessments

Estimated time to complete: 26 hours

The Birth Doula Skills module will be assessed through three assignments. The first asks you to research the services available to pregnant individuals within your local community. You will support two clients for a total of 20 hours, and there will be two assignments that ask to reflect on these experiences, first to evaluate the skills you utilized, and the other to reflect on the role you played, the expectations of yourself and your client, and to reflect on any challenges you experienced. Each assignment is submitted through the student learning website. Your trainer reviews your assignments and provides you with feedback.



## Business of Birth (5 hours)

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The Business of Birth module walks you through the steps of writing a business plan and prepares you for the different business aspects of doula work. This module is made up of:

- All about you
- Clients and competitors
- Products and services
- Designing the look and feel
- Promoting your business
- Finances and legal issues
- Looking to the future

# Completing Your Training and Certification

Once you have completed all the course requirements, you can apply for certification. Your request will be reviewed to ensure requirements have been met and, if you are on a payment plan, all payments have been made. The review usually takes 48-72 hours. Once completed, your certificate will be available to download from the student website.