



# **Birth Doula Certification**

## ***A Doula's Guide***

Dear future doula,

Welcome to the amazing work of becoming a birth professional. As taught by the founders of DONA International, the work of professional labor support is so incredibly important to many families world-wide. Together, we are making a difference for families AND for maternal health care! We are honored that you are interested in joining the esteemed group of DONA International certified doulas.



We understand that doulas come into this to work in a variety of settings and with a variety of clients. Training and certification with DONA International provides a fully comprehensive experience that will prepare you to work as a doula in the capacity that you see fit. From work with a non-profit to work as a full-time career, the support of a doula is valuable for the big picture.

The DONA International certification process is an at your pace process (within 4 years of your training workshop). That's right! From the time you take your approved birth doula workshop until the time you submit your packet, you have up to four full years. Some doulas work through the requirements quickly, in just a few months, while others take every single bit of the four year time allotment.

Your experience, your training, your pace!

This guide is meant to serve as an intro into our training process. You'll find that the process has several components, including hands-on training, course work, self-study, reading and experiential training/evaluation.

Our experience with training doulas for over 25 years has taught us that the in-person training is essential to getting your doula work off to a good start. After your workshop, our training process includes education in various other birth related topics such as breastfeeding, business, postpartum mood disorders and more.

At the end of the certification process, our doulas report that they feel confident and prepared to support birthing families.

We hope you will find this guide useful as you begin your journey. We invite you to read through the guide and explore the website. When you're ready, reach out to one of our approved trainers who will help guide you along the way.

With care,

All of us at DONA International

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## BIRTH DOULA CERTIFICATION

### An Overview

Further details (guidelines and required documentation) are available in your Birth Doula Certification Packet. Packets may be purchased through the DONA International website.

A DONA certified birth doula will receive and document the following items:

#### In-Person Training

- Attendance at a DONA approved birth doula workshop (valid for four years from completion)

#### Organizational Requirements

- Current Membership in DONA International (\$100)
- Purchase a DONA International Birth Doula Certification Packet. \*This begins the certification process. (\$40/50)  
The Certification Packet includes detailed information and all the forms required for certification. The packet must be purchased prior to any support experiences intended for certification. These support experiences have to take place after attending the workshop.
- Submit completed Certification Packet, supporting documents and the certification processing fee. \*This is the end of the certification process. (\$110)
- Agree to and sign the following documents:
  - DONA International Birth Doula Code of Ethics
  - DONA International Birth Doula Standards of Practice

#### Additional Class/Book Work

- Basics of breastfeeding education (online or in-person)
- Basic childbirth education in accordance with Certification Packet (in-person)
- Completion of required texts from the Birth Doula Required Reading List.

#### Birth Experiences and Evaluation

- Provide birth doula labor support to several clients and their families. Choose three (3) support experiences for certification that meet requirements.
- Provide thorough documentation (provided in Certification Packet) of birth support experiences including evaluations of services by health care providers and birthing parent.

#### Home Study

- Minimum attendance in one approved doula business webinars (online)
- Creation of Local Area Resource List (45 resources in approved categories)
- Essay on the Value and Purpose of Labor Support
- Written Reference from Perinatal Health Professional and Client

## Suggested Steps to Certification Financial Investment

<p><b>Membership in DONA International</b> Membership provides support benefits for your training process, including a subscription to the International Doula quarterly magazine and the eDoula member newsletter and discounts on services and products, such as certification packets, conferences, doula liability insurance, office supplies and more.</p>	<p>\$100<sup>1</sup> /year</p>
<p><b>Sign DONA International’s Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics</b></p>	<p>None</p>
<p><b>DONA Approved Birth Doula Workshop</b> DONA approved workshops are offered across the globe by a variety of world-class, excellent doula trainers. Some workshops have prerequisites, so check with your trainer for details. The birth doula workshop is valid for four years from the date of completion.</p>	<p>Approx. \$400 – 700</p>
<p><b>Birth Doula Certification Packet (purchase)</b> The Certification Packet will include specific details, requirements and all required forms/directions for the certification process. The packet is purchased via the DONA website and is valid for two years from date of purchase.</p>	<p>\$40<sup>1</sup> for members \$50<sup>1</sup> for non-members</p>
<p><b>Required Reading</b> Many doulas begin reading as they plan and prepare for their birth doula training workshop. Workshop participants should begin with The Birth Partner (Simkin) and bring a copy of the text to their doula workshop with them.</p>	<p>Approx. \$75 +/- Some books may be available to borrow from public libraries, or fellow doulas.</p>
<p><b>Childbirth Education</b> This requirement may be met in several ways</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attend a local childbirth education class</li> <li>• Attend Intro to Childbirth for Doulas in conjunction with your doula workshop*</li> <li>• Train as a childbirth educator</li> </ul>	<p>Varies *Some trainers include this requirement in their doula training workshop.</p>
<p><b>Business Themed DONA International Webinar</b> Business webinar options can be found on the DONA website under continuing education.</p>	<p>\$20</p>

<p><b>Breastfeeding Education</b> You may complete the breastfeeding requirement at any point prior to submitting your certification application. See certification packet for details.</p>	<p>Approx. \$0 - 50</p>
<p><b>Essay on the Purpose and Value of Labor Support</b> Your certification packet will include some guidance for writing this essay.</p>	<p>None</p>
<p><b>Basic Knowledge Self-Assessment Tool</b> Self-assessment is included in your certification packet.</p>	<p>None</p>
<p><b>Two References</b> Written references from a perinatal health professional and a doula client. Details included in the certification packet.</p>	<p>None</p>
<p><b>Certification Processing Fee</b> Certification processing fees cover the cost incurred to review your packet, as well as the materials that you'll receive once certified (certificate/new name tag etc.).</p>	<p>\$110<sup>1</sup></p>
<p><b>Copy/mail completed certification application</b> Shipping tracking recommended.</p>	<p>Copies/Postage</p>
<p><b>Total Estimated Investment</b></p>	<p>Approx. \$700-1100 Training and certification investment vary greatly, as many doulas find ways to maximize opportunities to invest appropriately (ie. use the library for texts, attending childbirth in conjunction with your workshop, etc.). Most doulas spread the fees out across the training process.</p>

<sup>1</sup> DONA International fees are based on the International Fee Group Index according to country of residence. For current fees in countries other than the U.S., check the International Fee Group Index in the DONA Boutique at [www.DONA.org](http://www.DONA.org) or call the Home Office at 888-788-DONA (3662). All fees are payable in U.S. funds only.

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## Birth Doula Certification

Be sure to follow the instructions carefully and meet the requirements in your DONA International Birth Doula Certification Packet.

1. How would I know if the workshop I am taking is DONA International approved?

Find DONA International approved workshops through our online locator at [Find a DONA International Doula workshop](#).

2. Do I have to be a member of DONA International to order my Certification Packet?

No, but DONA International members receive a discount. You must be a member at the time you submit your packet for review in order to become certified, and later to maintain your certification.

3. I noticed that some training workshops also offer an “Intro.” To be certified as a birth doula, am I required to attend an Introduction to Childbirth for Doulas (Intro) along with the doula workshop?

A DONA International approved introductory class is a one day class that satisfies the childbirth education requirement for birth doula certification. It is not a requirement to attend an Intro along with the birth doula workshop, but the Intro is one of the ways to satisfy the childbirth education requirement. It is highly recommended that you attend it if there are no, or very limited options for, childbirth classes for expectant parents offered in your area.

4. How many hours of training in a DONA International approved workshop do I need for certification?

A DONA International approved birth doula workshop will be at least 16 hours of instruction time, and it may be longer. You will need to attend the entire workshop in order to receive a certificate of attendance and to be able to use it for your certification application.

5. How many hours do I need to observe a childbirth education series?

You will need to observe an entire series of in-person childbirth classes taught to a group of expectant parents. You will want to look for a comprehensive series, if possible, which may be 12 hours or more of instruction time. Refer to your certification packet for details.

6. For the requirement to observe a childbirth education series, do classes offered by hospitals to prepare expectant parents for birth qualify?

They will meet the requirement unless you are attending as an expectant parent and also a participant, rather than an observer.

7. I have attended a childbirth education training workshop. I would like to know if this training is sufficient for the childbirth education component of the requirements to become a doula.

The workshop you attended would meet the DONA International childbirth education requirement for certification if you can provide a copy of your certificate and an outline of the coursework, and you are currently active as an instructor, or retired within three years of submitting your application.

8. I am nervous about attending births by myself. May I take a doula buddy with me?

It can be a wonderful opportunity to gain some experience and confidence to attend your very first births with another doula, for example, a doula who attended the same workshop as you did. You could also see if you can shadow and observe a DONA certified doula as s/he works with a client during a labor and birth. These can be wonderful learning opportunities. However, you will not be able to submit such births for certification. You must

have been the primary doula providing all the labor support to your client and any family in the experiences you submit with your application.

9. How do I order a certification packet?

Visit the [DONA International Boutique](#). You will need to register as a user to be able to make a purchase of your packet.

10. I am having trouble finding clients and attending births to complete the certification. What can I do?

Don't be discouraged if your business gets off to a slow start. As you gather information for your list of resources, network with other doulas, perinatal professionals and alternative and complementary care providers in your area, and use that opportunity to introduce yourself and let them know the services you offer. Getting your name out there can be hard at first, but it is well worth the effort as you begin to see positive results.

11. How long does a candidate have to complete the certification requirements?

You have two years from the date you purchase your certification packet to submit your application for certification. If your packet expires, you may purchase a one-time, six-month extension for \$10. After the six-month extension, if you still did not complete the requirements, you will have to purchase another certification packet and then meet the requirements in the second packet. We recommend that you order your packet in time for the first labor support experience you plan to use for certification after attending the DONA International approved workshop. This will allow you to make the most of the two years that your packet is valid. In any case, you must complete your certification requirements within four years of attending a DONA International approved workshop. The workshop itself is valid for four years, and there is no extension for it.

12. How much does a DONA International approved doula workshop cost?

Workshops vary in cost but tend to range from \$400-700, depending on the trainer and expenses involved in hosting a workshop. Fees also vary in what they include (tuition, books, etc.).

13. I am nervous about attending the birth by myself. What should I do?

Remember that the most important quality in a doula is a warm heart. More than anything, a warm smile, encouraging words and a soft touch are what you need to take with you to the birth. You are there to provide emotional support, not medical assistance. Your skills and knowledge will continue to grow with every birth. With the skills you attained at your doula workshop, you are ready to assist in your first births. You can do it!

14. Some of the births I attended were under 15 hours, but I did work with these clients during prenatal visits and during postpartum. Does that time count toward the 15 required hours?

DONA International's requirement is that you provide continuous in-person labor support for a total of at least 15 hours over three births. Each labor support experience does not need to be 15 hours. Prenatal and postpartum contact and visits do not count as labor support hours. The labor support hours begin when you join your client in person, before or at the onset of active labor, and then stay continuously for the entire labor, birth and immediate postpartum period.

15. One of the births I attended was a cesarean section. Can this birth still count for certification purposes?

Yes, as long as the cesarean birth meets all the requirements in your certification packet. Only one of the three births you submit for certification may be a cesarean birth.

16. I did not get a Client Confidentiality Release Form signed by one of my clients. Can I still use this birth?

To accept a birth for certification purposes, we must have a signature from the client/birthing person releasing the information. We cannot accept any paperwork without the signed release.

17. At every birth, I leave evaluations for the doctors or midwives and nurses to fill out, but I never get them back. What can I do?

Introduce yourself to them immediately and let them know you are working towards certification and will be asking for an evaluation at the end of their shift or before you leave following the birth. Show them the form and the questions. That way they will know to pay attention to you as they do their own work, and they will also see it will take no more than a minute to answer the questions on the form. The professionals providing an evaluation will need to have been able to observe and interact with you repeatedly and/or for a period of time during the labor and birth in order to be able to provide an evaluation.

18. May I use the same doctor or midwife more than once for my evaluations?

Yes, but we prefer to receive evaluations from different professionals for your three certification births, if possible.

19. How do I verify my DONA International membership status?

When you submit your application for certification, you must be a current member. You can verify your membership by checking the mailing label of the latest issue of your copy of the International Doula magazine. The expiration date of your membership appears in the upper right corner of the label. You can also check it on the [Member Login](#) on the DONA website. You do not have to call the home office to verify your membership if you know it is current.

20. How do I pay the certification application fee?

You may pay the fee online through the [Member Login](#) on the DONA International website, and include a copy of your receipt with your application. If you prefer, you may also include a check or International Money Order payable to DONA International in U.S. funds for the correct amount.

21. Where should I send my completed certification application?

Mail your completed certification application to:  
DONA International, Attn: Certification  
35 East Wacker Drive, Suite 850  
Chicago, IL 60601

22. After I send in my completed certification application, when will I hear from DONA International?

You may expect to hear within a month that your packet was received in the home office. It is difficult to predict when your packet will reach the hands of a reviewer, but do contact the DONA International home office if you have not heard from a reviewer within three months.

23. Is there anything I can do while I wait to hear about my application?

It is recommended that you still treat every birth you attend after you submit your application as a certification birth. Have your clients sign a Client Confidentiality Release Form, take detailed notes, complete the Birth Doula Support Record Sheets and request evaluations. That way you will have documentation for another birth, in case that is needed.

24. Is there anything I can do to speed up the process?

You can respond to your reviewer as soon as you are contacted. Respond to any questions or requests for more information promptly.

Best wishes to you during this journey!

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## **BIRTH DOULA CERTIFICATION REQUIRED READING LIST**

You must read the latest revision of both of DONA International's Position Papers and the book listed under Required Reading. In addition, you need to read at least one (1) of the most recently published editions of the books from each of the six (6) additional groups of books listed. To confirm and verify your reading, include the signed Statement of Completion form with your certification application.

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Must BRING to the workshop:

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The Birth Partner: A Complete Guide to Childbirth for Dads, Doulas and All Other Labor Companions by Penny Simkin (2013, or later)

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REQUIRED READING FOR CERTIFICATION / Beneficial Reading in Preparation for Workshop Attendance:

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DONA International's Position Paper: The Birth Doula's Contribution to Modern Maternity Care by DONA International (2012, or later)

·DONA International's Position Paper: The Postpartum Doula's Role in Modern Maternity Care by DONA International (2008, or later)

·The Birth Partner: A Complete Guide to Childbirth for Dads, Doulas and All Other Labor Companions by Penny Simkin (2013, or later)

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Group 1 - Read at least ONE of the following:

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The Doula Book: How a Trained Labor Companion Can Help you Have a Shorter, Easier and Healthier Birth by Marshall and Phyllis Klaus (2012, or later)

·Birth Ambassadors: Doulas and the Re-Emergence of Woman-Supported Birth in America by Christine H. Morton with Elaine G. Clift (2014, or later)

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Group 2 - Read at least ONE of the following:

·The New Pregnancy & Childbirth: Choices and Challenges by Sheila Kitzinger (2011, or later)

·Pregnancy, Childbirth and the Newborn: the Complete Guide by Penny Simkin, April Bolding, Ann Keppler, and Janelle Durham (2010, or later)

·The Mother of All Pregnancy Books: an All-Canadian Guide to Conception, Birth and Everything in Between by Ann Douglas (2012, or later)

·The Simple Guide to Having a Baby: a Step-by-Step Illustrated Guide to Pregnancy and Childbirth by Janet Whalley, Penny Simkin and Ann Keppler (2012, or later)

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Group 3 - Read at least ONE of the following:

· Optimal Care in Childbirth: the Case for a Physiologic Approach by Henci Goer and Amy Romano (2012, or later)

· An Easier Childbirth: a Mother's Guide to Birthing Normally by Gayle Peterson (2008, or later)

· Ina May's Guide to Childbirth by Ina May Gaskin (2008, or later)

· Natural Hospital Birth: the Best of Both Worlds by Cynthia Gabriel (2011, or later)

Group 4 - Read at least *ONE* of the following:

- Breastfeeding Made Simple: 7 Natural Laws for Nursing Mothers by Nancy Mohrbacher and Kathleen Kendall-Tackett, (2010, or later)
- Dr. Jack Newman's Guide to Breastfeeding: the Canadian Expert Offers the Most Up-to-Date Advice on Every Aspect of Breastfeeding by Jack Newman and Teresa Pitman (2015, or later)
- The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding by Diane Wiessinger, Diana West and Teresa Pitman (2010, or later)
- The Nursing Mother's Companion by Kathleen Huggins (2015, or later)

Group 5 - Read at least *ONE* of the following:

- This Isn't What I Expected: Overcoming Postpartum Depression by Karen Kleiman and Valerie Davis Raskin (2013, or later)
- The Hidden Feelings of Motherhood by Kathleen Kendall-Tackett (2005, or later)
- Transformed by Postpartum Depression: Women's Stories of Trauma and Growth by Walker Karraa (2014, or later)
- Postpartum Depression and Anxiety: A Self-Help Guide by Pacific Postpartum Support (2014, or later)

Group 6 - Read at least *ONE* of the following:

- The Doula Business Guide: Creating a Successful Mother Baby Business by Patty Brennan (2014, or later)
- Doula Programs: How to Start and Run a Private or Hospital-Based Program with Success! by Paulina Perez with Deaun Thelen (2010, or later)
- The Only Grant-Writing Book You'll Ever Need by Ellen Karsh and Arlen Sue Fox (2014, or later)
- Winning Grants Step by Step: The Complete Workbook for Planning, Developing and Writing Successful Proposals by Tori O'Neal-McElrath (2013, or later)
- You, Inc.: The Art of Selling Yourself by Harry Beckwith and Christine Clifford (2011, or later)
- Worth Every Penny: Build a Business That Thrills Your Customers and Still Charge What You're Worth by Sarah Petty and Erin Verbeck (2012, or later)
- Body of Work: Finding The Thread That Binds Your Story Together by Pamela Slim (2013, or later)