DONA™ INTERNATIONAL

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 worldwide. Together, we are making a difference for families AND for perinatal 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 3 years of completing 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 30 years has taught us that the workshop, whether in-person, hybrid, or virtual 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 lactation, 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

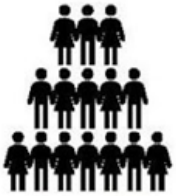
DONA INTERNATIONAL

BIRTH DOULA CERTIFICATION

An Overview

Further details (guidelines and required documentation) are found in your Birth Doula Certification Packet. Packets are distributed at the Birth Doula Workshop.

Complete a DONA-approved Birth Doula Workshop (in-person, virtual, or hybrid)



Become a member of DONA International

Fulfill the childbirth education requirement

Fulfill the lactation support education requirement

Do your reading assignments (2 position papers and 4 books)

Do a self-assessment questionnaire

Complete a resource and referral list for your community

After completing the Birth Doula Workshop, attend and document 3 birth support experiences

Purchase the certification application fee in the DONA Boutique

Fill out your application

Compile your packet materials and upload them at the address listed on your application fee receipt

Celebrate!

BIRTH DOULA CERTIFICATION

Potential Financial Investment

DONA Approved Birth Doula Workshop 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 three years from the date of completion.	Approx. $400-700
Membership in DONA International The benefits of membership include opportunities for networking, leadership, continuing education, and to participate in large scale advocacy for doulas and pregnant, birthing, and postpartum people; a subscription to the International Doula magazine; member newsletters, events, and updates; and discounts on services and products, such as applications for educators to provide DONA approved contact hours, conferences, doula liability insurance, office supplies and more.	$100[1]/yr (discount offered for multi-year purchase)
Childbirth Education Component Candidates who are not already a credentialed childbirth educator can meet this requirement in one of two ways: Either take an Intro to Childbirth for Doulas with a DONA approved trainer OR take a local Childbirth Education Series the meets the requirements set in the Certification Packet	Varies Some trainers include this requirement in their workshop
Lactation Support Education Component Candidates who are not already a credentialed lactation educator or peer counselor can meet this requirement in one of two ways: Either Take a Lactation Support class with a DONA approved trainer OR take a Lactation Support class for perinatal professionals that meets the requirements set in the Certification Packet	Varies Some trainers include this requirement in their workshop
Reading Requirement: 2 Position Papers and 4 Books Workshop participants will read The Birth Partner (Simkin) before their workshop and choose 3 more from a list of options in three groups for self-study	Estimated $75 Book purchases are not required.
Total Estimated Investment Training and certification investment vary greatly. Many doulas find ways to maximize opportunities to invest appropriately (ie. using library for texts, attending childbirth in conjunction with your workshop, etc.).	$600-1000

[1] 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 or call the Home Office at 888-788-DONA(3662). All fees are payable in U.S. funds only

Birth Doula Certification: Frequently Asked Questions

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 receive my Certification Packet?**
   No, but 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. **How do I register a Certification Packet I received at my training workshop?**
   Visit the DONA International Boutique. You will need to register as a user before being able to register your certification packet. You will be asked to enter the name of your trainer and the date of completion of your workshop when registering the packet.

4. **I took my workshop before April 15, 2023 and do not yet have a Certification Packet. How can I get one?**
   Contact the DONA approved trainer with whom you took your workshop to receive a packet.

5. **I took my workshop before April 15, 2023 and already have a Certification Packet. Can I get a refund and upgrade to the new packet?**
   There are no refunds and no fees to upgrade. If you choose to upgrade, you will be beholden to the application process as outlined in the new packet. There is no requirement to upgrade if you prefer to stay with the packet and application process you already have.

6. **How long does a candidate have to complete the certification requirements?**
   For candidates who completed their training before April 14, 2023: You have 4 years from the last day of your training to complete your packet.

   For candidates who complete their training workshop on or after April 15, 2023: You have three years from the completion date of your workshop 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 need to contact the Director of Certification to request approval to submit your application. If you are not sufficiently near completion of the packet, you may need to repeat a workshop.

7. **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.

8. **I noticed that some training workshops also offer an Introduction to Childbirth Education for Doulas (Intro). To be certified as a birth doula, am I required to attend an Intro along with the doula workshop?**
   There is a childbirth education requirement for certification. A DONA International approved introduction to Childbirth Education class is a one (1) day class that satisfies this requirement. You do not need to complete an Intro along with the birth doula workshop, but it is highly recommended that you attend it if that is an option, especially if there are no, or very limited options for, childbirth classes for expectant parents offered in your area. See the certification application for additional details and requirements.

9. **How many hours do I need to observe a childbirth education series?**
   If you are not taking an Intro class with your workshop, 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 must be 8 hours or more of instruction time and include certain required elements. Refer to your certification packet for details.

10. **If I attend(ed) a childbirth education series for my own pregnancy, does that course qualify?**
    No. Even if the course meets the required length and topic content, you must be participating as an observer, not as a student.

11. **I am a certified childbirth educator. Do I still need to take an Intro class**?
    No. You will provide your certification documentation with your application.

12. **I noticed that some training workshops also offer a Lactation Support for Doulas. To be certified as a birth doula, am I required to attend a Lactation Support class along with the doula workshop?**
    There is a lactation support education requirement for certification. A DONA International approved Lactation Support for Doulas class is a minimum 3-hour course that satisfies this requirement. You do not need to complete a Lactation Support class along with the birth doula workshop, but it is highly recommended that you attend it if that is an option, especially if there are no, or very limited options for, lactation support classes for perinatal professionals offered in your area. See the certification application for additional details and requirements.

13. **If I take a Lactation Education class for pregnant people, will it count for certification?**
    No, the Lactation Support Education class must be taught by a certificated lactation education professional (see your application packet for the kinds of professionals who qualify), be a minimum of 3 hours, include certain required topics, and be specifically for an audience of doulas and other perinatal professionals.

14. **I am a certified lactation educator/accredited peer counselor. Do I still need to take a Lactation Support class**?
    No. You will provide your certification/accreditation documentation with your application.

15. **How much does a DONA International approved doula workshop cost?**
    Workshops are taught by DONA approved trainers who operate independent businesses. The cost of their workshops vary 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, additional classes like the Intro to Childbirth Education and Lactation Support for Doulas, etc.).

16. **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.

17. **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 they work 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.

18. **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!

19. **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.

20. **I have attended 3 births, but the sum total of hours of labor support across these 3 births did not equal 15 hours. Can I stay longer in the immediate postpartum to increase the support hours?**
    No, only 30 minutes of immediate postpartum per birth can be included in the sum total.

21. **One of the births I attended was a cesarean section. Can this birth still count for certification purposes?**
    Yes, cesarean births whether planned or unplanned may be used for certification. You may only use one planned/scheduled cesarean in your application, however. See your application packet for further details.

22. **Am I required to attend a cesarean birth for certification?**
    No, qualifying births for certification are outcome dependent.

23. **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.

24. **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 require a very short evaluation and affidavit that they observed you with your client. 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. If no one on the care team is able to complete this form, you may have another member of your client's support team present at the birth complete the form, such as a partner, family member or friend.

25. **May I use the same doctor, midwife, or nurse more than once for my evaluations?**
    Yes, but we prefer to receive evaluations from different professionals for your three certification births, if possible.

26. **How do I verify my DONA International membership status?**

When you submit your application for certification, you must be a current member. You can 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.

27. 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.

28. Where should I send my completed certification application?

After paying for the Application Fee online through the DONA Boutique, you will receive an email with a link and instructions to submit your certification packet through the online submission process. Check your spam folders if it does not appear in your inbox.

You may also mail it to:

DONA International
35 E. Wacker Dr., Ste 850
Chicago, IL 60601 *Please do not send it signature required on receipt.

29. 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.

30. 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.

31. 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.

Birth Doula Certification: Required Reading List

The required reading for certification includes two (2) DONA International Position Papers and four (4) books. You will read The Birth Partner and choose one book from Groups A, B, and C for a total of four (4) books. For each book, you will write three-to-five (3-5) sentences about your take-aways. This should be a personal reflection, what you learned or how you plan to use this book in your work, not a restatement of the book's topic or content.

Find the Positions Papers in the Resource Library at https://www.dona.org/the-dona-advantage/resource-library/ or in your Birth Doula Workshop Manual. All books on the required reading list are available in print or e-book unless otherwise noted. Books available as audiobooks are marked with asterisks (***).

Position Papers:

1. DONA International (2016). *Position Paper: The Birth Doula's Role in Perinatal Care*

2. DONA International (2016). *Position Paper: The Postpartum Doula's Role in Perinatal Care*

Books:

1. Simkin, P. and Rohs, K. (2018). *The Birth Partner: A Complete Guide to Childbirth for Dads, Doulas and All Other Labor Companions, 5th edition.* .***

2. Group A. Choose one (1) of the following books:

    - Douglas, A. (2015). *The Mother of All Pregnancy Books: An All-Canadian Guide to Conception, Birth and Everything in Between*, 3rd edition.
    - Hutcherson, H. and Williams, M. (1997). *Having Your Baby: For the Special Needs of Black Mothers-To-Be, from Conception to Newborn Care*, 1st edition.
    - Simkin, P., et al. (2018). *Pregnancy, Childbirth and the Newborn: The Complete Guide*, 5th edition. ***

3. Group B. Choose one (1) of the following books:

    - Davis-Floyd, R., et al. (2019). *Birth in Eight Cultures: Brazil, Greece, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Tanzania, United States.*
    - Luke, J. M. (2018) *Delivered by Midwives: African American Midwifery in the Twentieth-Century South,* 1st edition.
    - MacDonald, T. (2016). *Where's the Mother? Stories from a Transgender Dad.*
    - Neufeld, T. H. and Cidro. J. (2017). *Indigenous Experiences of Pregnancy and Birth.*
    - Rosswood. E. (2016). *Journey to Same-Sex Parenthood.* (Available in print only)
    - Roberts, D. (2016). *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty.*. ***

4. Group C. Choose just one (1) book from a special interest topic. You may choose a book on this list or another book that informs on your community or practice. If you choose a book that is not on this list, include an assessment of whether or not your chosen book aligns with the DONA International model of care in your written take-aways:

    - Birth Planning
        - Chidi Cohen, E. (2017). *Nurture: A Modern Guide to Pregnancy, Birth, Early Motherhood–Trusting Yourself and Your Body.*

  - Gabriel, C. (2018). *Natural Hospital Birth: The Best of Both Worlds*, 2nd edition.
  - Goer, H. (2022). *Labor Pain: What's Your Best Strategy? Get the Data. Make a Plan. Take Charge of Your Birth.* ***

- Business/Motivation
  - Brown, B. (2015). *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead.* ***
  - Karsh, E. and Fox, A. S. (2019). *The Only Grant-Writing Book You'll Ever Need*, 5th edition.
  - Petty, S. and Verbeck, E. (2012). *Worth Every Penny: Build a Business That Thrills Your Customers and Still Charge What You're Worth.*
  - Singh, D. (2018). *Purposeful Hustle: Direct Your Life's Work Towards Making a Positive Impact.* ***
  - Slim, P. (2013). *Body of Work: Finding the Thread that Ties Your Story Together.* ***

- Doula History
  - Klaus, M.H., et al. (2012). *The Doula Book: How a Trained Labor Companion Can Help You Have a Shorter, Easier and Healthier Birth.*
  - Morton, C. H. and Clift, E. (2014). *Birth Ambassadors: Doulas and the Re-Emergence of Woman-Supported Birth in America.*

- Perinatal History
  - Amnesty International. (2010). *Deadly Delivery: The Maternal Healthcare Crisis in the USA* (Available as a PDF download on amnesty.org.)
  - Cassidy, T. (2007). *Birth: The Surprising History of How We Are Born.* ***
  - Gonzales, P. (2012). *Red Medicine: Traditional Indigenous Rites of Birthing and Healing.*
  - McGregor, D. K. (1998). *From Midwives to Medicine: The Birth of American Gynecology.*
  - Seals-Allers, K. (2017). *The Big Letdown: How Medicine, Big Business, and Feminism Undermine Breastfeeding.*

- Anti-bias, systemic racism, and cultural awareness
  - Brown, Jennifer. (2022). *How to Be an Inclusive Leader: Your Role in Creating Cultures of Belonging Where Everyone Can Thrive.*
  - DiAngelo, R. (2016). *What Does it Mean to be White? Developing Racial Literacy*, revised edition.
  - Oluo, I. (2019). *So You Want to Talk about Race.* Seal Press. ***

- Lactation
  - Barber, K. (2005). *The Black Woman's Guide to Breastfeeding: The Definitive Guide to Nursing for African American Mothers.*
  - Gray, R. and Hills, A. (2015). *Born to Breastfeeding: The First Six Weeks and Beyond.*
  - Kaplan, R. and Theuring, A. (2018). *Latch: A Handbook for Breastfeeding with Confidence at Every Stage.* ***
  - Logan, J.V. and Sangodele-Ayoka, A. (2014). *Free to Breastfeed: Voices of Black Mothers.*
  - Mohrbacher, N. and Kendall-Tackett, K. (2010). *Breastfeeding Made Simple: Seven Natural Laws for Nursing Mothers.* ***

- Postpartum
  - Breedlove, G., et al. (2018). *Nobody Told Me About That: The First Six Weeks.*
  - Johnson, K. A. (2017). *The Fourth Trimester: A Postpartum Guide to Healing Your Body, Balancing Your Emotions, and Restoring Your Vitality.* ***

- Kleiman, K. (2013). *This Isn't What I Expected: Overcoming Postpartum Depression*, 2nd edition. ***
- Kleiman, K. (2019). *Good Moms Have Scary Thoughts: A Healing Guide to the Secret Fears of New Mothers*. (Available in print only)

- Difficult or Traumatic Birth
  - Rosewood, R. (2013). *Cut, Stapled and Mended: When One Woman Reclaimed Her Body and Gave Birth on Her Terms After Cesarean*. (Available in print only)
  - Simkin, P. and Klaus, P. (2004, or most recent edition). *When Survivors Give Birth: Understanding and Healing the Effects of Early Sexual Abuse on Childbearing Women*, 2nd edition. Classic Day Publishing. (Available in print only)
  - Summerfeldt, J. (2018). *Healing After Birth: Navigating Your Emotions after a Difficult Childbirth*.
  - Vredevelt, P.W. (1994). *Empty Arms: Hope and Support for Those Who Have Suffered a Miscarriage, Stillbirth, or Tubal Pregnancy*. ***