

Guidelines for Observing Childbirth Classes

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One of the requirements for DONA doula certification is to attend a series of childbirth classes, not as a pregnant mother. Please be aware that as a doula attending these classes you are representing doulas as a whole. Some childbirth teachers will welcome your presence. Others may be uncertain or have misconceptions about your role. Some may have had unpleasant previous experiences with observers. In any case, your actions at these classes will be teaching them about doulas! You are a guest.

The following guidelines were developed with input from various childbirth teachers:

- 1) Ask permission and make arrangements to attend the childbirth class series ahead of time. You may be asked to pay. Be clear about whether you are asking to attend the whole series, or just one class.
- 2) If you are making arrangements through a central office, ask if you can call the teacher directly to tell her you will be coming. Teachers appreciate advance notification and talking with them gives you an opportunity to ask them if they have any questions, concerns or guidelines for you.
- 3) Arrive early the first night. If you have not done so beforehand, explain a bit to the teacher about why you are there and what you will be doing (learning, not talking). Offer to act as an assistant if needed. (Bring cookies or fruit, set up the snack, turn the lights off, move furniture etc.) Sit in a less desirable seat so the students have free choice of the best seats.
- 4) During class *do not* offer additional information unless asked to do so. It is not your place to "add to the curriculum" or share birth stories. Do not undermine the teacher or try to fill in missing pieces in her class. Your role is to observe, period. As a doula, you may very well have clients that have taken this or a similar class. This is a great opportunity to see it through their eyes, learn what they have learned and to model the doula's role of supporting her client, not leading them.
- 5) If you have a significant concern about something taught, you could ask the teacher a question privately. Be tactful! Remember your role. She is the expert on teaching and may have very good reasons for teaching or not teaching what she did.
- 6) Before and after class and during breaks be aware that the teacher's first obligation is to her students. Do not monopolize her time. As the series progresses it is appropriate to ask her when would be a good time to ask any questions you might have. Some teachers are more than willing to have you come early or stay late or call them outside of class with questions - others may not be. In general, avoid asking questions during

class time, since you may be asking questions about curriculum/issues that are not normally covered at all, or not at this time. Your perspective as a doula is likely to be quite a bit different than those of a pregnant family. The teacher should not have to take class time to answer questions about doula work.

7) Because of liability issues, do not touch the students to assist with teaching labor support techniques unless you are asked to help.

8) It may be okay to talk to students at break about your doula services, or doulas in general, but ask your teacher first. Some programs will not allow it. Honor their rules.

9) During class, do not promote your services as a doula, unless asked to by the teacher. If asked, keep it short (less than 2 minutes) unless more time is offered.

10) Thank the teacher with a note or phone call. Let her know what you enjoyed or learned!