

Lifespan Doulas Doula Scope of Practice

Standards of Practice

The Role of the Doula

- The essence of doula care is to provide non-medical, non-judgmental support and guidance to individuals and families through times of critical, transformative life change.
- Doulas nurture, inform, support, guide, empower, and comfort.
- Doulas work in tandem with other caregivers and members of the medical or hospice teams.
- Doulas foster self-determination in their clients by assisting in the gathering of information and encouraging families to make informed choices that are right for them.
- For client needs outside of the doula's scope of practice, the doula makes referrals to appropriate professionals and community resources.
- Doula support is focused on, and adapted to, the unique needs and requirements of each person/family served.

Limitations to Practice

- As non-medical care providers, doulas do not perform clinical tasks such as prescribing treatments, monitoring vital signs, administering medication, or pronouncing a death.
- The doula refrains from giving medical advice or from persuading clients to follow a specific course of action or treatment.
- The doula refrains from imposing his/her own values and beliefs on the client.
- Doulas do not undermine clients' confidence in their caregiver(s). However, in cases where clients are initiating a discussion about a caregiver's advice or expressing dissatisfaction with a caregiver's practice or attitudes, the doula uses good listening skills to support clients to consider their options.
- Doulas do not usurp the role of other professionals and caregivers such as the doctor, midwife, lactation consultant, or hospice team members.

Limitations Specific to End-of-Life Doulas

- Medical Aid in Dying (MAiD). When supporting individuals who have chosen MAiD, it is imperative that doulas maintain their non-clinical, non-medicalized role. Doulas may provide guidance, education, and planning for the MAiD process and be present as a witness and guide. Doulas are prohibited under the scope of practice from handling medications that will result in a person's death.
- Doulas must abide by variable state laws relevant to services they provide (e.g., laws concerning the practice of MAiD or acceptance of payment for hands-on care of the deceased, use of the term "funeral planning," etc.).

Considerations Regarding Multi-Credentialed Doulas

- While understanding that doulas will draw from their full range of knowledge, skills, and life experience, it is important to realize that offering enhanced or blended services may send a mixed message to the consumer regarding the role of the doula. The doula cannot, for example, be a non-clinical care provider and simultaneously “prescribe” an herbal regimen or assume responsibility for wound care.
- If a doula wears more than one professional hat and is seeking to leverage a blended skill set (e.g., nurse, social worker, pastor, herbalist, aromatherapist, massage therapist) while providing doula services, then she/he is obligated to make her/his additional roles and credentials transparent to the client.

Continuing Education

- Doulas have a duty to maintain and update their knowledge in their chosen field. It is understood that professional doulas will engage in ongoing efforts (e.g., reading, podcasts, webinars, workshops, e-newsletters), from trusted sources, to ensure that they are always sharing the latest in evidence-based information with clients.

Code of Conduct

Ethical Duty to Clients

- In all professional interactions, the doula demonstrates the highest level of personal integrity by accurately representing her/his level of experience, training, and credentials.
- Doulas should establish clear communication with clients, both verbally and in writing, regarding their availability, services included in their care, limitations to services, backup doula policies, and fees (including amount charged, retainers, terms of payment, and refund policy).
- Non-abandonment. Doulas have a duty to complete services as promised, according to the terms of the agreement. If the doula is unable to complete services to a family (through personal choice, emergent need, or unavoidable conflict), then she/he is obligated to: (1) give the family as much notice as possible; (2) help the family get their needs met by activating backup doula support in accordance with her/his stated backup doula policy; and (3) if backup support is unavailable, the doula should refund all client fees paid in advance for services not rendered. Volunteer doulas who agree to provide services for no cost or reduced cost have no less a duty to complete services to the client, as agreed.

Duty to Maintain Client Confidentiality

- While doulas do not fall under HIPAA mandates, they nevertheless should behave as though they are HIPAA-mandated to protect the confidentiality of their clients’ private medical information.

- Doulas promise to maintain absolute confidentiality regarding the client's personal information, photos, and story. If seeking to share client-related information for any purpose, including publishing photographs, or sharing the client's story, the doula must first obtain the client's permission.
- The doula's promise of confidentiality also extends to family members and to other care providers involved in the client's care.
- When given permission to share personal information, all identifying demographic information should be omitted, unless the client has given express permission to be identified.
- Special care must be taken to protect client confidentiality when using social media.

Duty to the Doula Profession

- Each doula represents the doula profession and carries the duty to do so in a responsible, ethical, and professional manner.
- Doulas understand that they are part of a worldwide community of doulas and will treat one another with respect and kindness, regardless of affiliation.