



International Childbirth Education Association

## Prerequisites, Training, and Certification for the Childbirth Educator

### Prerequisites for a Childbirth Educator

Women and babies have within them the inherent wisdom necessary for birth. Although a pregnant woman may at times require medical intervention, pregnancy and birth are normal, natural, and healthy events. For this reason ICEA maintains that no single training or academic background is necessary for an individual to become a childbirth educator. Similarly, no single profession includes within it all the appropriate training, knowledge, and skills necessary for competency as a childbirth educator. Childbirth education combines aspects of the arts and sciences of many disciplines, including teaching, sociology, social work, anthropology, physiology, psychology, midwifery, nursing, and medicine. Any person, regardless of educational or professional background, who successfully completes a childbirth education training and/or certification program may be considered a childbirth educator. (See Competencies and Training Programs for Childbirth Educators.)

A competent childbirth educator may be female or male, parent or non-parent, married or single. Although giving birth is a valuable personal experience, one can be a competent educator without having done so. Sensitivity, empathy, compassion, and knowledge are more important attributes than the educator's gender or the type of birth experienced.

### Competencies and Training Programs for Childbirth Educators

Although a person need not have a specific educational or professional background to teach childbirth classes, specialized training or preparation facilitates competence as a childbirth educator and therefore is considered to be mandatory for the profession. This training may be provided by childbirth education groups, self-education, apprenticeship, or a combination of these methods. The training program should enable the childbirth educator to demonstrate competency in the following subject areas:

1. Basic counseling, group leadership, adult learning theories, and communication skills;
2. Anatomy (male and female) and physiology of reproduction (conception through postpartum);
3. Physical, emotional, and social changes of pregnancy, birth, and postpartum;
4. Emotional changes of the father at each phase of pregnancy, birth, and postpartum;
5. Impact of pregnancy and parenthood on the couple relationship;
6. Coping mechanisms for labor, including relaxation, breathing, visualization, comfort measures, and physiologic methods of labor and birth management;
7. The benefits of labor support;
8. The grief and mourning process that follows loss and/or unexpected outcome;
9. Body conditioning exercises for pregnancy, birth, and postpartum;
10. Perinatal screening and diagnostic procedures;
11. Common physiological complications of pregnancy, birth, and postpartum;
12. Obstetrical interventions, procedures, and medications, including their indications, benefits, risks, and alternatives (nonmedical and medical);
13. Teratogenic and iatrogenic influences in pregnancy;
14. Fetal development and newborn characteristics;

15. Newborn assessment and procedures, including circumcision;
16. Maternal and infant nutrition, including breastfeeding;
17. Family development;
18. Sexuality and family planning;
19. Techniques to aid understanding and evaluation of research;
20. The history, development, and philosophy of childbirth education;
21. Elements of family-centered maternity care;
22. Cultural diversities for pregnancy, labor, birth, postpartum, and parenting; as well as
23. The doctrines of informed consent, and the rights and responsibilities of parents and newborns.

Upon completion of a training program the childbirth educator should also be able to demonstrate the following teaching competencies:

1. Presentation of material in a clear, concise, understandable, non-authoritarian manner;
2. Enthusiasm, sensitivity, and respect for others;
3. Use of self-evaluation;
4. Preparation of an extensive teaching plan based on measurable learner objectives;
5. Ability to draw distinctions between personal beliefs or opinions and scientific fact;
6. Use of principles of group process and facilitation;
7. Understanding and application of adult education principles; and the
8. Use of appropriate and effective audiovisual materials.

The childbirth educator should demonstrate professional responsibility by:

1. Developing constructive relationships with other members of the health care circle who have contact with class participants;
2. Acquiring knowledge of national, regional, and local laws and regulations pertaining to the rights and responsibilities of expectant and new parents and the legal responsibilities of the child birth educator;
3. Acquiring knowledge of professional organizations relating to prenatal education and early parenthood; and
4. Demonstrating knowledge of community health and social service agencies to which parents may be referred.

The childbirth educator should demonstrate the ability to exercise judgment when sharing ideas, personal beliefs, and evidence-based research with parents. The educator should:

1. Keep current on the latest medical trends pertaining to pregnancy and childbirth;
2. Maintain familiarity with current scientific findings pertaining to pregnancy and childbirth;
3. Assess the validity of such trends and findings;
4. Maintain objectivity;
5. Recognize the right of parents to accept or reject care, printed materials, ideas, or alternatives; and
6. Recognize that the responsibility for making informed choices and decisions ultimately rests with the pregnant woman and her family.

### **Accreditation and Certification**

ICEA maintains that certification is a valid goal for a childbirth educator. Although certification alone does not guarantee the competence of an individual as a childbirth educator, certification does demonstrate that an individual has successfully met certain standards of competency. As stated in the previous section, local childbirth education groups and individual instructors can design their own training programs but professional preparation for the certification of childbirth educators should be offered by organizations that specialize in this field.

The art of childbirth education is learned through practice and application of skills. An individual may have an extensive knowledge base, yet lack the necessary skills to share this knowledge with expectant families during a childbirth education series. Therefore, ICEA maintains that a certification program should verify the acquisition of knowledge as well as teaching skills. Teaching skills cannot be learned in a singular workshop. The acquisition of both knowledge

and teaching skills is best accomplished through an ongoing certification program that includes the following:

1. Seminars, workshops, and/or conferences;
2. Directed readings;
3. Observation of classes;
4. Directed practice teaching;
5. Observation of labors and births in a variety of settings;
6. Evaluated teaching;
7. Evaluations from both parents and peers; and
8. Periodic renewal or recertification that mandates continuing education, birth observations, peer evaluation, and membership in professional childbirth education associations.