

## Role and Scope of the 1000 Days Family Counselor

### Position

The International Childbirth Education Association (ICEA) defines First 1000 Days Family Counselors as professional sources of information with skills to provide continuity of care and support for families for the 270 days of pregnancy, through labor, birth, and the first 2 years of parenthood. ICEA recognizes that First 1000 Days Family Counselors positively impact health and developmental outcomes as members of the health care team.



### ICEA's Vision

Pregnancy and the birth of a baby represents the birth of a family and new relationships. Emerging with the pregnancy, the birth of a newborn and the care of the child are unique individual and social responsibilities within the family, the local, and the global community. ICEA contends that the First 1000 Days of a person's life – which begins with conception, includes pregnancy, labor, birth and continues until the child's second birthday – is a critical phase during which the foundations of a child's development are formed. ICEA acknowledges that too few families receive the education and support they need for their children to grow and thrive optimally. The ICEA First 1000 Days Family Counselor not only supports pregnancy, birth and the first 2 years of childhood within the local community, but believes that supporting families through the First 1000 Days ultimately nurtures the world in all its similarities and diversity.

### ICEA Goals

1. Provide quality education and support emphasizing compassion, collaboration, and choice.
2. Set the standards for the diversified birth professional.
3. Advance ICEA as a leader in the field of maternal child health.
4. Promote evidence-based options in maternal child health through collaboration and networking.
5. Improve birth outcomes for all families in the international community.

The ICEA professional First 1000 Days Family Counselor focuses on wellness, health-promotion, and knowledge of informed consent, evidence-based care, and the use of nonmedical and self-care techniques to encourage a normal, safe and healthy, pregnancy, labor, birth and developmentally appropriate care of the child to the age of 2.

Inherent in a family-centered model of maternity care is the team. The team includes the birthing individual, family, healthcare providers, and community resources.

Within this framework, ICEA believes that a First 1000 Days Family Counselor:

1. Upholds the right of the family to health care that is accessible, affordable, and individually appropriate;
2. Supports a health care system that does not discriminate in services or alternatives on the basis of race, sexual orientation, color, culture, age, language, marital status, or method of payment;
3. Facilitates a climate of trust, respect and positive regard for others;
4. Functions as an advocate who supports and protects the natural processes of birth and breastfeeding;
5. Supports and advocates for respectful maternity care;
6. Supports the right of the family to make informed decisions based on knowledge of benefits, risks, and alternatives;
7. Promotes mother, baby and family-centered maternity care as well as breastfeeding and parent-infant bonding for all family members;
8. Supports the practice of open communication and shared decision-making among all members of the family's care team;
9. Cooperates with medical, midwifery, and nursing communities, health and social service agencies, as well as other members of family's care team;
10. Views families as capable of understanding information concerning pregnancy, birth, breastfeeding, complementary feeding, and childcare and who are capable of taking responsibility for their own healthcare and that of their child;
11. Recognizes that education, counseling and support are only three of many interrelated factors affecting the process and outcome of pregnancy, birth, breastfeeding and child development;
12. Provides evidence-based information anchored in current research;
13. Identifies the need for guidance and referral and offers them when appropriate;
14. Helps families develop and implement healthy behaviors for pregnancy, birth, infant and young child feeding, early parenthood and child spacing.

### **Role of the First 1000 Days Family Counselor**

As a member of the healthcare team, the First 1000 Days Family Counselor is an advocate for healthy families, supporting the family's growth and development as they transition through pregnancy to parenthood. In addition, the First 1000 Days Family Counselor is an advocate; promoting the health, autonomy, individuality, integrity and dignity of the family.

Within this context ICEA maintains that the role of the First 1000 Days Family Counselor is to act as:

1. A teacher who:
  - provides information about the physiology, psychology, and sociology of pregnancy, childbirth, postpartum, and early parenthood;

- demonstrates skills to assist and support families to adopt healthy behaviors for nutrition, hygiene, environmental concerns, safety and child development and parent-child interactions;
- provides opportunities for exploration and practice of health promoting skills related to family planning, pregnancy, childbirth, infant and young child feeding, and early parenthood; and
- encourages communication between the family and other members of the health care team.

2. A counselor:

- who helps families better understand and value the importance of the First 1000 Days; and
- who recognizes that individuals bring unique experiences, relationships, and perspectives of pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, and early childhood.

3. An advocate for families; and

4. A spokesperson for the development of a maternal-child health care system that provides access for all to safe, low-cost, and family centered care both in the community and the hospital.

### Implications for Practice

ICEA believes all individuals have the right of access to education, counseling and support regarding the First 1000 Days. Programs should be financially and geographically accessible in all communities and be sensitive to individual differences of age, culture, race, health status, socioeconomic status, and partner status. To ensure that First 1000 Days programs are accessible, ICEA encourages government and other agencies to develop programs and policies to assure all families have access to First 1000 Days counseling.

Care for families for the First 1000 Days should be based on information sharing and joint collaboration during pregnancy, birth, postpartum and early childhood among all members of the health care team. ICEA believes that the First 1000 Days model will lead to improved health and wellness for children, their parents, their family and their community.

### Examination

The multiple-choice exam is offered virtually, in Arabic, in June and December.

### Exam Eligibility Requirements

Candidates must be recommended by an [ICEA partner organization](#) who affirms that all eligibility requirements are met by the candidate.

The course of education covers the required detailed content

The candidate has demonstrated required competencies

### Recertification

Recertification is every 3 years upon receipt of 18 hours of appropriate continuing education.

### References

[WHO recommendations: intrapartum care for a positive childbirth experience](#)

[The first 1,000 days of life: The brain's window of opportunity \(unicef-irc.org\)](#)

[Brochure.pdf \(un.org\)](#) Nutrition, the first two years are forever

[ZAF-First-1000-days-brief-2017.pdf \(unicef.org\)](#) Survive and Thrive

[PEDS 20173716 1..10 \(aapplications.org\)](#)

[Eat, Play, Love -- Why A Child's First 1,000 Days Make All The Difference \(forbes.com\)](#)

[UNICEF Early Moments Matter for Every Child report.pdf](#)

[Infant and young child feeding \(who.int\)](#)