



LABOR OR BIRTH OBSERVATION GUIDELINES

ICEA Childbirth Educator Certification Program

The labor or birth observation requirement is designed to provide an opportunity for ICEA certification candidates and ICCEs, regardless of professional background, to increase their knowledge of the uniqueness and complex simplicity of birth and to assess and learn from the reactions of the laboring woman and her partner.

It is ICEA's belief that everyone can benefit from a fresh look at the human reaction to birth. It is up to the candidate or ICCE to identify those areas of least familiarity with birth and to learn and grow with each required observation. ICEA believes that practical experience in labor observation and support is an important requirement for certification. Local member groups are encouraged to promote such experiences as preparation for teaching and to develop observation report forms which act as a tool to supplement this experience. In the study guides, ICEA provides a guide for self-assessment rather than a rigid structure for learning.

LABOR OR BIRTH OBSERVATIONS AS A CERTIFICATION PREREQUISITE

Observe a minimum of two labors or births according to ICEA guidelines within two years prior to the date stamped on the certification examination application.

1. Observations must be done after entering the ICEA Childbirth Educator Certification Program.
2. Candidates should have the observation verified on the official verification form at the time of the observation/support. ICEA will accept a verification written on a separate piece of paper if it is completed on the day of the observation and contains the date, signature and position/title of the person who is verifying the observation.
3. The candidate's own birth experience(s) are not applicable to this requirement.
4. Observations cannot be done while providing medical or nursing care.
5. No more than two labors and births may be observed in a twenty-four hour period.
6. Observations become invalid if they were completed two or more years prior to the date stamped on the application form.

OBSERVATION EXPECTATIONS

ICEA encourages all candidates to observe more than the minimum number of births and to observe the widest possible range of experiences. There is little benefit in labor observations that reinforce what the candidate already knows, or exposes the candidate to birth environments or care providers with whom the candidate is already familiar. A candidate who has primarily supported women in labor while being emotionally involved should include some labor observations where the candidate sits and observes in a more clinically detached fashion. A candidate who has primarily been in labor and birth situations in a clinically detached way should include some experiences where the candidate acts as a support person and becomes more emotionally involved with the laboring woman. A self-assessment sheet is included in the labor and birth observation material to help the candidate determine where on each continuum the candidate has had the most experience. Because there is an intense personal involvement in one's own birth that can blind the laboring woman to an objective assessment of what is happening, candidates may not use their own birth experiences.

While observing a birth, the candidate should note the effect the environment has on the laboring woman and her partner. Observe how the care providers influence and interact with the laboring woman and her partner, the birth process and the progress of birth. Observe the effect of the non-invasive and invasive procedures used during labor and birth. Finally, observe the physical, emotional, psychological, and/or spiritual interactions between the laboring woman and her partner. Also included in the study guides is a copy of "Labor or Birth Observation Questions," which is designed to encourage reflection and comparison of birth observations. ICEA cannot accept written reports of labor and birth observations, but it encourages the candidate to note what has been learned from each observation and share this information with the local group or other instructors.

PROVIDING SUPPORT WHILE OBSERVING

A candidate may only observe or may be directly involved as a support person for the woman or for the couple. However, candidates may not provide medical or nursing care.

There is no restriction on whom the candidate may observe or support. It may be easier in some situations to observe or support one's own class couples. The benefit is that the candidate can see how well the laboring woman and her partner use what was taught. The candidate would already be familiar with the woman and her partner and their interpersonal relationship. On the other hand, some women will react in a more stilted fashion if the instructor is present, desiring to please the instructor or being fearful of "making a mistake." The laboring couple may try to impress the instructor rather than "tuning in" to the laboring woman's needs. Candidates need to be careful of "taking over" for the primary support person.

In some circumstances, a candidate may find it easier to go to a facility and observe or support a laboring woman who gives her consent. The candidate can benefit from observing the reactions of an unprepared woman. If, on the other hand, the laboring woman requests support, the candidate can learn from supporting a woman who has had little or no preparation.

GETTING PERMISSION TO OBSERVE AND/OR SUPPORT

The candidate should get written or verbal permission from the appropriate person(s) at the facility before attempting to complete an observation. If necessary, the candidate can modify the sample letter and photocopy pertinent items from the study guides. When permission has been granted, contact the appropriate person at the facility to arrange for a time to observe or ascertain the procedure for being a support person. The candidate is subject to the rules and regulations of the birth facility.

The candidate is a guest of both the birth facility and the laboring woman, and is expected to act accordingly. The behavior of an observer or a support person can make an indelible impression on the laboring woman, especially if injudicious comments are made. It is expected that the candidate will observe or support the woman in non-interfering ways unless specifically requested to do otherwise.

WHEN PERMISSION IS DENIED TO OBSERVE

If permission to act as an observer or be a third party at a birth is denied, it is the candidate's responsibility to seek to support a laboring woman as the primary support person. Each candidate is expected to develop professional relationships with area caregivers. These caregivers can be the source for ascertaining which women will not have a support person present with them in labor. The candidate can then serve as the primary support person. Or, the candidate can approach area welfare agencies or groups that give support to single mothers with the offer to act as a support person for mothers who have none.

If the candidate has exhausted all possible sources for observation or for supporting a laboring woman, the candidate may ask ICEA to send a letter to area birth facilities informing them of ICEA's certification program and the certification prerequisites. Candidates who have difficulty should realize that they, as a local person, have more effect than a distant organization would. Keep in mind that the candidate has approximately two years to complete this prerequisite and should continue to develop professional relationships with persons who can effect change in the community.

If the candidate requests that ICEA send a letter to area facilities, the following information should be included in the letter of request: the addresses of the birth facilities and a contact person at each; a description of the measures used to seek permission to observe or act as a support person; and written letters of refusal from the facilities. After ICEA has written the letters, the candidate should re-contact the facilities with a follow-up letter or telephone call. The candidate should also continue to seek opportunities to support laboring women through referrals from area care providers with whom the candidate has a professional relationship.