

Consumer Guide to End of Life Training

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This Consumer Guide is written for people who are new to end of life training, those who are not professionally involved in their present line of work.

There is a surge of interest all over the world of people **looking for training** to serve the dying either as part of their present practice or as a new way to serve people in their communities. There is also a great increase in the amount and kinds of trainings to meet the demand.

There are many things to consider as you decide which end of life training to take. I'd like you to be aware of a few things as you look over the vast array of trainings being offered all over the world. There are many wonderful programs. Get clear on exactly what you are looking for and you will most likely find it.

For the most part, you will feel "right" about whomever you choose to work with as that person or program will resonate with you at the time you are looking. And, there are some things I'd like you to keep in mind as you look around.

This page is my *Consumer's Guide to End of Life Training* and a special focus on End of Life Doula "Certification" issues.

Overall Considerations

In the field of end of life, unless you work within hospice or special end of life positions within a hospital or community organization (there are very few roles), it is hard to find a way to serve the dying "at the bedside" if you feel called to do this. Within hospice, there is the chaplain, nurse, social worker and CNA as paid positions. There are volunteers as well.

As the end of life field grows, there will be other roles within the established health care systems and organizations that have yet to be developed but I have faith the present industry will grow with the demand. It just will take time.

Special Focus: the end of life Doula

A developing role is you can also create your own way, with your special gifts and in your style how to serve the dying in an independent practice, as a professional or volunteer. This movement has been going on for many years. It has been moving into the mainstream little by little, so it will be easier to develop a practice as time goes on.

When I first started in 2005 in private practice, very few programs were around. They were mostly through established schools and organizations like the Shira Ruskay Center in New York. The home funeral industry was taking off then and independent programs were being developed within that movement. In just a short period of time, it is amazing how many end of life companion type programs, outside of the home funeral industry, have become available. It is wonderful! And there are some things to be mindful of as you compare programs.

Not everyone who companions the dying and their families call themselves a doula. There are many different names based on the concept of what a person will be doing. It is a very individual preference for the person practicing. Some examples are: death doula, doula for the dying, death midwife, midwife for souls, soul midwifery, transition guide, death coach, end of life guide, and many others.

But the word 'Doula' in relation to dying *is* in the mainstream now. The Baylor University Medical Center has a program. There is a hospice in New Jersey with a program of end of life doulas.

Because it is finally in the mainstream, there are wonderful implications but there are also some things to watch for, just as in any industry. One of the main things right now are claims that you need a certain certification to practice as an end of life Doula. Know that is not true. There is no credentialing agency on any level at this time. I will say more about that below.

Spotlight: Checklist for an End of Life Doula Program

I am focusing below directly on end of life doula programs, (outside of home funeral programs, as home funeral programs are established and they teach a specific skill set). Because end of life doulas could be focused on many different services, I want you to be very clear about what you are seeking in training so you will be getting exactly what you want.

Also to keep in mind, I have actually been written to by people who have never served in this way setting up end of life doula programs. Sometimes the program sounded lovely but how can a person train you to do something and know about the specific issues involved, when they have never done it?

To train you to operate within an organized system within a hospice or hospital or community group is one thing, to train you as a personal end of life Doula in independent practice is quite another. There are great programs for all of it. The question is, which do you want?

As a consumer, I would like you to consider the following when you are looking specifically for an end of life doula program.

The Program Itself:

1. Is it a program that will train you to volunteer with an organization's program? Or is it one that will train you to do individual work?
2. Is the program training you for a special skill or in a general way?
3. Is the program stating you must have their program to be certified to practice as an end of life Doula? As there are so many ways to serve the dying at the end of life, most experienced Doulas and Midwives to the dying that have worked in the movement over many years agree, WE DON'T WANT A REGULATING AGENCY DETERMINING WHO IS QUALIFIED. I have been in this movement talking with others who have trail blazed this path all over the world since 2000, and not one person in the industry that I know is for a credentialing or certifying agency telling us what can be done or should be done or not done. We are too individualistic. Sometimes our only unifying bond is the people we serve.
4. The 'certificate' that you get from each program, any program, only means that you completed *that* particular program. It takes years to develop a good reputation that your program is sound. There are both old and new programs all over the world. The better ones never state that you have to have their program to be recognized or to practice.

The Instructor/s:

1. Is the person training you to become a private end of life Doula or one within an organization or community group?
2. If they are training you to become a private end of life Doula, are they an end of life Doula herself or himself? Have they ever been?
3. How long has the teacher been experienced in caring for families independently, not within an agency or organization?

4. Is the program creator drawing from education, training, and personal experiences? It is fine to create a program based on a theory that you have become passionate about. This is done all the time; just know from whom you are learning.

5. What is the background of the person teaching the course? Are those the skills you want to learn?

Comparing End of Life Training Programs (all kinds)

Most programs teach an overall overview of end of life concepts and things to be mindful of when you are serving the dying. Some programs are focused on a certain skill or area of time during the process, i.e.: vigiling, after death care, home funerals, death care, etc. First question should be: "Am I looking for an overview or for a specific skill or concept?"

These programs are usually taught by someone or a group of people with invaluable end of life training in some capacity, like a physician, nurse, chaplain, social worker, death educator or end of life doula or midwife. They can give you priceless insights on how to serve the dying from their perspective on how they do it.

They should know the issues involved and be subject matter experts and have the passion and the calling to serve. Check out their background and find out where they have most of their experience. If they are training you that is what you are going to learn: what they know within their system of reference.

Below are the various ways you can learn the material and what makes them unique.

Correspondence/On-line/Tel-seminar Courses

These types of courses vary between self paced and group instructor led trainings. It depends on the instructor how much feedback you get so check out instructor involvement carefully. Most of these are self paced and there is no interaction with the instructor. You can download videos or education materials and work through them at your leisure.

Seminar Course

Seminar courses are typically over a day or 2 or up to a week in a group setting. Usually this will be in lecture style and small group break out exploratory sessions.

School Based

These are usually at a university level or at a school known specifically for death education. The classes are more formal and structured and usually involve a several day or weekend intensive as well as material learned in a classroom setting or online.

One to One Mentoring

You are working with the instructor personally, developing your understanding and integration of the material and of how you want to use it with someone as you learn.

Mixture of correspondence and group training

There are some programs that are very intense in participation over time and through an experiential group component.

Tips and Warnings

- All programs are not created equal. Decide what is most important to you. Are you just looking for information? Do you want to build a practice? Do you want to supplement what you are learning within the volunteer program you are in?
- From whom do you want to learn? A physician? A spiritual or religious person? An end of life Doula? A RN? A Death Educator? Someone who runs a school?
- What is your style of learning? Do you want to read and write essays? Do you want to self explore? Do you want just the facts? Do you want to be mentored over time? Do you want hands on learning? Do you want to be with a group?
- Watch out for any program that suggests you need to have their program to practice as an end of life "whatever". When you purchase that trainer's program, you are not recognized by any one licensing or credentialing board.

Which Should I Choose

What I ask people to do who contact me for training is the following:

Put some time aside, at least 45 minutes, Center yourself spiritually. Write out on paper with pen in your handwriting how you want to serve the dying. If you had all the money and time and energy in the world, how would you want to do it? Here is your vision, now find your training to make that happen.

Write about some of the following also:

- 1) Do I just want information for information's sake?

- 2) Do I want a self paced system with no interaction with an instructor?
- 3) Do I want to be part of a group?
- 4) Do I want to hear from a particular 'voice?' A religious view, spiritual teaching, professional angle, university setting,
- 5) Do I have a goal of a private practice in mind?
- 6) Do I want one on one mentoring?
- 7) Do I enjoy group intensives over 1 or 2 days?
- 8) Do I want hands on learning? face to face learning?
- 9) Are skype/phone calls good for me?

Other Tips:

- Once you have answered the above questions, it will be easier to compare programs as you will be focused on exactly how you want to learn the information.
- as you peruse all the websites, note the ones you are drawn to. Yes, its marketing but the person who created that had a say or built the whole thing him/herself. While its not their packaging you are putting heavy thought into (they may not be good at that), you are getting a sense of their energy and what is important for them to relay.
- How does your heart feel when you talk to the teacher? Great? Skeptical? Cautious? Safe? Do you want to explore further? Or do you have a nagging feeling this isn't right for you? Listen to your inner voice!
- Talk to at least 3 of the instructors or narrow it down to 3 correspondence courses. Sleep on it. You usually have a sense which to do after this.
- Finally, if you had all the money in the world and could take any of the 3, which would you do? Do that one. We find the money to do exactly what we want usually. Here is no exception.
- Enjoy the process! The process should be enjoyable. You are investing a lot of time, energy and money to pursue your dream. It should be honored and a joy to do so :)

Peace,
Deanna

Good luck!