Have a Rewarding Career Comforting the Dying and Their Loved Ones

FabJob Guide to

Become a Death Doula

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1. Introduction

“We must practice the art of dying so that when our death is upon us we will not be afraid but recognize it as the most loving thing there is—and fall into it completely.”

Rev. Olivia Bareham,
Death Midwife, Home Funeral Guide,
Celebrant, Conscious Dying Educator
SacredCrossings.com

Welcome to the world of death doula’ing!

Some may accuse you of being morbid for wanting to work with people at the end of life. Strange. Weird. The topic of death is something the majority of people today try to avoid, refuse to discuss, and attempt not to think about. Yet, here you are, aspiring to walk alongside the dying. Is something wrong with you?

Absolutely not! There is nothing wrong with you at all.

Death doulas are not “obsessed with death.” They are in love with life. End-of-life doulas are so in love with life that they hope to bring comfort and peace to the very last seconds of every person’s time in this world.

The transition from this world to the next—or the transition from a state of being alive to being dead, however you personally choose to describe it—can be as beautiful and meaningful as the time of birth. Certainly, it is sad to say goodbye. But it doesn’t need to be frightening.

“People will often say to me, ‘Isn’t [working as an end-of-life doula] depressing?’ And like, actually no, because it’s not my death. Just like it wasn’t painful for me to be a [childbirth] midwife, I wasn’t the one going through labor. When someone dies, it’s actually a wonderful thing to be able to make that a better experience. To empower people find meaning and make meaning and navigate and be fully present with that. You see such amazing things.”

Merilynne Rush,
MS in Hospice & Palliative Studies, RN, BSN
Lifespan Doula Association
https://www.lifespandoulas.com

As a death doula, you will help individuals—as well as their friends and families—face death with a little less fear and a little more love.

This guide will give you everything you know to get started on this unique and important career path.

1.1 A Career as a Death Doula

If you’re reading this guide, you already have a general idea of what a death doula is. But it’s very possible you have never actually met a death doula. You may have only discovered this as a career path after reading a news article, or after researching the world of death and dying. It’s possible your local area doesn’t have even a handful of end-of-life doula professionals. It’s also likely you have a limited definition of what being a death doula could mean.
This is all great news. You may soon be surprised to learn about all the possibilities and directions open to end-of-life doulas. You are also very likely to be one of the first death doulas in your area. You’ll be a trailblazer in a new profession that desperately needs people.

Did You Know? There are many possible ways to title your work in this field, some which refer to specific specialties and others that can be more general. You may call yourself a death doula, an end-of-life doula, dying guide, a death coach, a deathwalker, a mourning doula, a death care or end-of-life specialist, a community death care advocate, a death midwife (sometimes specific to those who conduct home funerals or specifically offer vigil work), a soul midwife, a thanadoula (from the word thanatology, the scientific study of death), an elderly care doula, or a pet death doula. Throughout this book, you’ll notice that the experts quoted are referred to in a variety of ways and titles. This is because the choice of title is very personal. Eventually, you’ll need to decide how you’d like to refer to yourself in this work.

TIP: Be aware that there have been some legal challenges in Canada to those wishing to use the term “midwife” outside of the context of a licensed childbirth midwife. If you decide to use the phrase midwife in your title or business name, there’s a theoretical possibility that you will be pressured or forced to legally change it.

1.1.1 What an End-of-Life or Death Doula Is

An end-of-life doula is a support person—man or woman—who provides nonjudgmental, non-medical holistic support to those nearing the end of life. An end-of-life doula also typically offers support to the friends and family of the elderly, dying, or recently dead. An end-of-life doula educates and empowers individuals to make decisions on their own end-of-life care and final burial or funeral.

Note that end-of-life doulas are all genders—despite the word “doula” grammatically referring to a female in the Greek origin of the word—and end-of-life doulas serve people of all genders.

End-of-life doulas also aim to provide information to the dying and their family, to help them become familiar with the normal and natural
stages of dying. In demystifying the dying process, they help to reduce fear and anxiety.

End-of-life doulas are nonjudgmental. They support the dying without any preconceived notions of what dying should look like. Their job is not to inject their own meaning of death to a family but to help a dying person and their loved ones come to their own conclusions. A death doula is not there to tell a dying individual the “right” or “best” way to die, but to help the dying make their own decisions after learning about their options.

An end-of-life doula is also not there to impart a specific spiritual agenda, to “save” a person’s soul, or in any other way impose their personal beliefs onto the dying.

An end-of-life doula may explore spiritual beliefs with the dying—through active listening and conversation—or may provide support that respects the dying’s religious desires. They may serve as an active listener so the dying and their family can reevaluate their spiritual or religious thoughts on death and burial.

But the death doula does not push or try to “sell” any specific philosophy of death. They are only a mediator, supporter, or compassionate listener, while the dying considers their life legacy and what it means to die.

“Doulas support clients non-judgmentally, according to their needs, values and priorities, and are not agenda-driven. A certain humility is required to be truly effective and empowering in this work. [End-of-Life Doula]s can support families many months before active dying, and many months afterward. Training should include an awareness of this, even if particular doulas then choose to go on and only focus their work on the active dying phase or after death care. End-of-life doula really encompasses it all—the whole “dying year” or years.”

Merilynne Rush,
MS in Hospice & Palliative Studies, RN, BSN
Lifespan Doula Association
https://www.lifespandoulas.com

End-of-life doulas are non-medical. While many death doulas are inspired to enter the field after working on a medical team in hospice or
palliative care, the role of a death doula is non-medical. A death doula does not provide medical care, though they may help advocate for the dying and help ensure they get the medical care they need from the healthcare support team.

A death doula may provide physical support. For example, a death doula may offer healing touch (like holding a person’s hand), gentle massage, and physical care needs that are often left for families to provide (like keeping the dying individual clean, dry, and comfortable.)

Death doula support is holistic. Holistic care is support that goes beyond the physical needs of a person but also considers their emotional, social, and (possibly) spiritual needs.

End-of-life doulas educate and empower the dying and their families on their end-of-life care, funeral, and burial options. They may introduce or help a dying individual walk through the steps of creating a living will or advanced care directives. After those documents are completed, the doula may help advocate for the dying’s end-of-life decisions, especially when they are no longer able to voice those wishes themselves.

The death doula may provide information on various funeral options, including the possibilities of having a living funeral—a ceremony that occurs while the dying are still alive and able to participate—or the option of a home funeral. They may help a dying person or the mourning family consider traditional funeral options as well. A death doula may also introduce them to options like green burial, or help the family find ways to reduce the cost of dying.

End-of-life doulas may serve...

• the elderly (possibly for years before their death is due for arrival)
• the terminally ill, at any age
• the grieving, those who have lost or are about to say goodbye to a loved one
• those facing the loss of a pet or beloved animal
• those not near death but who want to wrestle with and confront their mortality now

• those looking to practically plan for end-of-life, at any age, regardless of health status

1.1.2 Why Death Doulas Matter

We are doing death and dying wrong.

Just consider the following:

• Most people near death are unable to express their end-of-life medical care desires. But few people take the time to put down on paper what they would want while they are alert and well.

• A 2014 Kaiser Health study (https://www.kff.org/health-costs/poll-finding/kaiser-health-tracking-poll-september-2015/) found that 9 in 10 felt doctors should discuss end-of-life care decisions, and 8 in 10 said they would feel “very comfortable” talking about end-of-life care with their family.

• However, that same study found that only 17 percent—barely 2 in 10—have actually had conversations on end-of-life care with their doctor or health care provider.

• Until very recently, discussions surrounding end-of-life care planning were not covered by health insurance. Talking about advanced care directives was referred to as “death panel” discussions in some political circles (https://khn.org/news/docs-bill-medicare-for-end-of-life-advice-as-death-panel-fears-reemerge/): an inaccurate and fear-based reference.

• Even when patients have advanced care directives available, their doctors may not be aware they exist. One study found that only 1 in 4 doctors knew if their patient had advanced care directives in place (https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/facing-death/facts-and-figures/).

• Studies have found that around 80 percent say they would prefer to die at home (https://palliative.stanford.edu/home-hospice-home-care-of-the-dying-patient/where-do-americans-die/).
But less than 20 percent actually do die at home. Sixty percent die in the hospital and another 20 percent in nursing homes.

This gap between what people want and what they get is partially because the medical model of care is designed to keep people alive at all costs—sometimes at the expense of their quality of life. The medical model of care often leads to taking “extreme measures” to keep a person breathing and their heart beating long after there is hope for them to survive in the long term.

Of course, it’s a good and wonderful thing that doctors and nurses aim to keep people alive and well when prognosis is good and hopes for a decent quality of life is available.

Also, if a person wants so-called “extreme measures” to be taken, or wants to die in a hospital or hospice and not at home, those wishes should be respected.

But, dying with dignity—and having time to consider what that means to an individual—is important. “Staying alive” isn’t and shouldn’t always be the assumed goal.

Death doulas can help close these gaps between what people really want and what occurs.

More so than any other service provider, death doulas stand in a position to empower people to make decisions while they still can, to consider what a “good death” looks like to them, and then help advocate for those wishes at the end.

Note! There have been misconceptions that death doulas are there to assist in or push an “aid in dying” agenda (also known as euthanasia.) This is absolutely not true. While a death doula may be there to support a person who has chosen aid-in-dying, may help a person explore their local legal options, and may sit by the bedside of a person who has chosen this path, a death doula does not specifically encourage aid-in-dying and never assists in the medical tasks involved.
1.1.3 How End-of-Life Doula’ing Differs From Other End-of-Life Professionals

Every member of the end-of-life team is needed, and this is also true of death doulas. Your role and your services are unique from others who may offer care or provide services to the terminally ill, the dying, and the elderly. The profession of end-of-life doula may be new—but the need for this profession has always been there.

Hospice nurse

A hospice nurse’s primary role is to attend to the medical needs of the patient. Remember that death doulas do not provide medical care. They do not take vitals, give medications, do patient assessments, or work with the attending physician to care for a client’s medical needs.

Hospice nurses also provide emotional support to their patients and families. Compassionate care is a big part of hospice nurse work. However, the time they have to offer support beyond medical needs is scarce. Both home and hospice center nurses have many other patients to care for, and many responsibilities, that make sitting by the bedside of a dying patient difficult to impossible.

Nurses rely on volunteers and people like death doulas to provide patients that extra time and personal touch that they wish they could provide, but just can’t.

Hospice nurses may look into becoming death doulas—professionally or in a volunteer role—because they want to have the flexibility and freedom to offer more holistic care. Expect to sit alongside hospice nurses if you attend a death or end-of-life doula training. You yourself may be a hospice nurse!
Hospice volunteer

Hospice volunteers may provide support to both patients and staff. Their role may include sitting by the bedside as a patient is dying (No One Dies Alone projects), visiting patients at any stage of illness to provide company and companionship, or providing practical or office support to the hospice staff.

However, as a hospice volunteer, your role will be limited by the organization or hospice providing care. You will need to abide by regulations set by the hospice, which are of course vitally important but can limit how much and what kind of support you offer. You may want to provide services that goes beyond the hospice bedside, but that would be outside of the scope of your volunteer position.

There are many services that end-of-life doulas can offer that just don’t fit inside the role of a hospice volunteer. (You’ll learn much more about this in Chapter 2.)

Also, practically speaking, volunteer work is wonderful—but we all need to make a living. You likely have a limited amount of time you can dedicate free of charge. Death doula work enables you to make this work your passion and (possibly) your living.

Many death doulas get their start as hospice volunteers. In your work as a death doula, you will likely work alongside hospice volunteer staff. Sometimes, there is a lack of volunteers. Volunteers may only be assigned to those without friends and family. Your presence is needed by those alone and those sitting with loved ones.

Nursing home staff

If you’re looking into elder care doula work, you may find yourself with clients in nursing homes. Hospice care may also occur in the nursing home setting, in some cases. This means you will be working alongside nursing home staff.

Nursing homes are notoriously understaffed. Reports have estimated that up to 90 percent of nursing homes do not have the staff required to care for their residents (https://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/18/us/9-

Whether you find yourself delivering workshops on end-of-life decision-making, working with clients as an elder care doula, or offering vigil or hospice work specifically, your presence is desperately needed. The nurses, certified nursing assistants, and volunteers will all be grateful for your help.

**Housekeepers and food delivery**

If you decide to offer services as an elder care doula, you may offer light housekeeping and shopping assistance to your clients. As a death doula, you may or may not offer the same to help support the dying and their family. Couldn’t the family just hire a housekeeper or use a food delivery service? Yes…. and no.

While those services may be helpful—and as a doula you might refer and work alongside housekeeping and food delivery—your work is not comparable.

A housekeeper will clean things up… but he is unlikely to consult with the family about how to arrange the room to best support the dying and their loved ones. He is unlikely to help create sacred space for the dying, or, for the elderly, create rooms that offer encouragement to continue with beloved hobbies or social activities.

After death, a housekeeper won’t be there to consider how to organize the home or personal belongings of the dying, to help decide what to keep, what to give away, and offer the emotional support as family makes these decisions. Housekeepers are unlikely to assist in creating sacred rituals to make this process healing and cleansing.

Food delivery is helpful… but the delivery service won’t sit with your client and discuss what they want to eat (or what the family wants to eat), how to best nourish everyone’s physical and emotional needs, or to reduce time and effort put towards meal preparation.

As an elder care doula, you may sit with your client and help create a meal plan, and even cook some of those meals. Or cook or bake together with your client, in an act of companionship and practical help.
You are much more than a housekeeper or food delivery service.

**Therapists and counselors**

Therapists, psychologists, and psychiatrists diagnose and treat mental health issues. End-of-life doulas may refer clients to psychological professionals and may help individuals and families recognize signs of depression or anxiety. However, doulas do not diagnose or treat mental illness.

As an end-of-life doula, you will likely find yourself having emotionally intense conversations about death and dying. You will use many skills that mental health professionals have, like active listening and offering compassionate support. But that’s not psychological therapy.

Some therapists do decide to add death doula work to their toolbox, and you may find yourself training alongside mental health professionals.

> “I’m a social worker, too. I was volunteering with a senior aging in place, getting to know her and others like her who also needed services, through my organization, I started seeing how many gaps there are in services for sick people, and elders. Eventually, I was inspired to work for change in home health and hospice. But, even these programs were missing something. Families’ emotional needs weren’t being met. The missing piece was time, and unconditional support; emotional, practical, informational. I knew there was a way to bridge the gap. When a hospice nurse friend mentioned a Death Doula certification course, I knew I was starting down my true path.”

Emily Pinzur, End-of-Life Doula

[www.silverwheelhealing.com](http://www.silverwheelhealing.com)

**Funeral directors**

Death doulas are not funeral directors. While some death doulas also offer home funeral guidance and support, that’s an accessory service and not the essence of death doula work.

As a death doula, you may help your clients consider their options before they die—or you may help a grieving family navigate the post-death arrangements. You may or may not help educate clients on all
their funeral and burial options, including things like green burial, home funerals, and of course more traditional funerals.

You should get to know the local options for funeral services and burial, and be at least somewhat familiar with local laws, so you can offer consultation and referrals. If you don’t know what’s available, you can’t discuss it with your client.

But you don’t take the place of a funeral director.

1.1.4 Services Provided by an End-of-Life Doula

One of the most exciting things about becoming an end-of-life doula is the flexibility and openness of your job description. This is a new career with almost limitless possibilities. What does death doula work look like?

A day-in-the-life of a death doula may include...

• Meeting with a healthy client and their family in the dining room of their home, going over advanced care directives, helping them understand their options for the future, facilitating conversation between the client and his or her family, and helping them get their wishes understood and documented.

• Standing vigil by the hospital bedside of dying client. Creating sacred space for the dying and their loved ones by “lighting” electric candles, playing soft classical music, reading poetry, or using hospital-approved aromatherapy.

• Visiting an elderly client at their home who has no immediate family living nearby, making sure their basic needs are being met, creating a plan to meet those needs, offering conversation and companionship, helping with meals or light housework, planning
your next visit, and reporting back to the elderly client’s family on their father/mother/sister/brother’s well-being.

• Giving a workshop on what a “good death” can mean at a local library to a diverse crowd, of all ages and backgrounds. Educating the group on what they can do now—while they are well and active—to ensure they die with dignity and peace.

• Conducting a “living funeral” for a cancer patient at their hospice bedside. Helping plan the event and, on the day of, helping direct the ceremony, and possibly documenting the “funeral” through pictures or video or keeping a detailed written record.

• Meeting with the friends and family of a recently passed loved one, who left this world suddenly and tragically. Helping them navigate their burial and funeral options, putting them in touch with appropriate resources, educating them on the natural and normal stages of grieving, and creating a plan together on how you can best support them in the coming days and weeks.

• Holding the hand of a terminally ill client, and listening to their fears, life stories, and wishes for their end of life. Possibly offering guidance for taking those stories and creating a legacy project, something to help them process and admire the amazing life they have lived, and create a physical remembrance of that life.

All this freedom to create your career is also a possible disadvantage to death doula work—there are so many options that you may feel tempted to offer everything to everyone. Don’t do this!

Instead, consider all your current skills and talents. Consider what has brought you into this field of work and how you can best serve. Start there. Offer just a few services very well instead of offering lots of services just okay. Begin to seek out additional training and education in the field. With time, you may expand, shift, or re-define what end-of-life doula work means to you.

### 1.2 The End-of-Life and Dying Industry

“I absolutely think we can have any career we want, including as full time doulas. My approach, and the approach of MourningDoula.Com where I studied, is to offer a continuum of services, and roll out our
method across the country. The idea is that people and families start having better conversations about death and dying earlier through talking with End-of-Life Doulas. Then, later on, those same individuals and families work with me as a Death Doula. Then, that family might want a Mourning Doula. Then they might want to have a home funeral, and later hire me as an organizer. For me, I get to help people in lots of different ways. I offer creative problem solving, energy healing, emotional support; all the things that work for me in my own life. It’s organic, it makes sense.”

Emily Pinzur,
End-of-Life Doula
www.silverwheelhealing.com

“I would encourage students to be suspicious or at least curious about any programs claiming that they will be professionals or have a career or job afterward. Not many people are making a reasonable living in this field and websites can be misleading.”

Cassandra Yonder,
Death Care Specialist
http://www.deathmidwifery.ca
http://www.deathcaring.ca

Can you make death doula work a career? Yes. Can you make a full-time living working as an end-of-life doula? Yes. Is this common and do most doulas make a full-time living with this work? No, not yet. But the potential is there for those who hustle, work hard at educating the public at what they do, and think outside the box.

The truth is that many of those looking to become end-of-life doulas aren’t interested in making a full-time income. They may want to supplement their income, or this may be a source of additional cash during retirement. Many end-of-life doulas intend to primarily do the work on a volunteer basis, or might hope to volunteer for the majority of their clients while getting paid from a few others to support the volunteer work.

When we asked working death doulas if you can make a living at this work, we received a variety of answers—everything from “it’s very unlikely” to “absolutely yes, and I am one of those doulas making a full-time income.”
What are your prospects of making a living at this work? That’s up to you. Don’t let anyone tell you that you can’t do it, if this is your dream. At the same time, if making a full-time income from this work isn’t your goal, don’t let anyone dissuade you from pursuing your passion. No one says everything we do in life has to be all about money.

Regardless of your personal goals—whether to earn a living at this or simply make some extra cash on the side—the market and potential for end-of-life doula support is there.

Consider the following...

- In a *Time Magazine* article, on “7 New Jobs That Are So 2017” ([http://time.com/money/4631366/new-jobs-2017/](http://time.com/money/4631366/new-jobs-2017/)), profiling unique and exciting job possibilities, death doulas are on the list. The possible annual salary for a death doula is listed in the article as “$40,000 to $70,000 (private practice).” It’s unclear what their source is for this salary quote, but there are end-of-life doulas making full-time incomes.


- Remember that not too long ago, hospice care was a new concept. The first hospices to open in the USA and Canada only occurred in 1974 ([http://www.chpca.net/about-us/history.aspx](http://www.chpca.net/about-us/history.aspx)). Only in the 1980s and 90s were laws passed requiring health insurance companies to cover hospice care. Once considered unusual, hospice care is now considered the standard of care for those at the
end of life, with research showing many benefits (https://www.nhpco.org/history-hospice-care). In 2016, 1.43 million Medicare beneficiaries spent at least one day in hospice care (https://www.nhpco.org/sites/default/files/public/Statistics_Research/2017_Facts_Figures.pdf). The emergence and increasing popularity of the death doula movement fits right in line with the increasing popularity of hospice.

• The Baby Boomer Generation—those born between 1946 and 1964—have long been considered cultural changers and take-chargers of life transitions. They are frequently cited as being responsible for getting the homebirth and homeschooling movements off the ground. Now, as they move into retirement and near end-of-life, “taking charge” of death and dying is the next natural frontier. The U.S. Census Bureau estimated that there are 77 million baby boomers in the United States of America.

• The National Funeral Directors Association lists “Advanced Funeral Planning,” “Green Burial,” and “The Popularity of Personalization,” in an article (http://www.nfda.org/news/trends-in-funeral-service) on trends seen in the funeral industry. These concepts all tie into the same umbrella as the death positive movement and end-of-life doula support services.

As you can see, interest in the death positive movement and the need for end-of-life doula care is rising. This guide will give you all the information you need to begin working in this field and plan for long-term success.

1.3 Benefits of Being an End-of-Life Doula

“I am drawn to work with dying and ill patients because it’s the song of my soul. It’s my passion. It is important to recognize the importance of who I am and to add that liveliness to what I do. This is the way my soul chooses to grow, and in return, I help those I meet along the way. We are in this together. We are all one.”

Carol Neustadt,
Certified End-of-Life Specialist (CEOLS)

Being an end-of-life doula will enable you to be a part of one of the most important, transformational moments of people’s lives. The
positive impact you will have on those at the end of life and their loved ones is immeasurable. As a career, end-of-life doula‘ing enables you to choose your clients, be your own boss, and be a pioneer in death positive movement. Here are some of the many benefits of becoming an end-of-life doula or death midwife.

**Be Inspired and Awed by Your Work**

You could say that the most awe-inspiring moments in life are at the start—at the moment of birth, when the child takes his or her first breath—and at the end, when a woman or man takes their last breath.

As a death midwife, you will have the honor of attending and being present at this moment.

“There is no greater honor or privilege than to attend someone’s final rite of passage; to be present as they commit their last act as a human being. It is a profound, awe-inspiring event that leaves you forever changed. Each instance is different. Some are a whisper or a sigh – others more active. Sometimes I feel the presence of Others in varying degrees of strength. Other times, there’s nothing – just a slipping away, a peaceful absence of humanness, an empty vessel. Each time it leaves me with this awe-junkie sense of being grounded in my own mortality, the macro and microcosm aspects of my place in the world, and the vastness of energy in the universe as it cycles and constantly gives birth to itself.”

Rev. Angie Buchanan, Death Midwife
www.DeathMidwife.org

**Empower People to Live Life Fully to the End**

Death doulas act as a kind of life coach for those at the end of life. They empower their clients to consider their last years, months, weeks, and even days carefully and thoughtfully. Whether you start working with an individual just after the diagnosis of a life limiting illness, or you start working with them towards the very end, your role in reducing fear and regret at the end of life will help them face their last days with increased inner strength, peace, and resolve. In other words, you will help them live life to the fullest potential—whatever that means for them at this moment.
When you actively listen to your clients, you help them process and accept the many emotions that come on our last days. When you work with clients on legacy projects, you enable them to celebrate the amazing life they have lived. For those that are harboring regrets, your support and encouragement may help them resolve those regrets, sometimes by helping them directly reach out and make amends, and sometimes by compassionately listening to their story and life history.

When you guide people as they write advanced care directives and set their end-of-life wishes on paper, you enable them to make decisions for themselves long after the point when they would otherwise be capable of voicing those wishes.

The cycle of life and death can make some feel powerless—but you return some of that power to the men and women you work with.

**Help People Have Better Deaths**

As you already read in section 1.1.2, people are not dying the way they hope to die. Many people hope to die at home, but instead are dying in hospitals. We don’t always have a choice over where we die, or what our last moments look like—but sometimes, we do. Death doulas show people how they can make these choices and die the way they want.

Death can be sad. It’s never easy to say goodbye. But death and dying can also be beautiful and spiritual. Whether you help plan an active vigil, create sacred space or introduce rituals, or sit by the bedside of the dying, you are making a tremendous impact on the death experience.

Most people are afraid to die, afraid of the transition that every single living thing must make on this planet. But, when you come as an end-of-life doula to your client, and tell them you are there to help reduce some of the fears surrounding this inevitable part of life? That alone enables them to have a better death.

> “[It is a] gift to be a source of comfort and ease for the dying and their families. Helping people wrap up loose ends and settle into the embrace of their death instead of succumbing to the fear of it.”

Rev. Angie Buchanan,
Death Midwife
[www.DeathMidwife.org](http://www.DeathMidwife.org)
Don’t forget also the physical and emotional comfort you provide by sitting by the bedside, holding their hand, wiping a cool cloth on the forehead, playing soft comforting music, encouraging their loved ones to lie next to them, or talking to them softly in their last moments.

**Be Involved in Work That Is Completely Engrossing**

There are no “boring” days at work when working with individuals at the end of life. Being completely present with people, serving them and offering comfort in their last days, and walking alongside them as they consider the meaning and legacies of their lives—these are not actions you can make half-heartedly.

> “Working with people at the end of life is incredibly empowering and humbling at the same time. It requires you to be totally present.”

Nathalie Bonafé, PhD, CEOLD (Certified End-of-Life Doula)
https://www.agentlerparting.com

**Be a Source of Comfort for the Grieving**

Let’s not forget that death midwives and end-of-life doulas are not only serving the dying—they also serve the loved ones of the dying. Sometimes, it’s a friend or family member that hires the services of an end-of-life doula. You also provide comfort to the mourning.

Having a loved one die—whether over an extended period of time from illness, or suddenly in an unforeseen accident—can be traumatizing and overwhelming. There are so many practical issues to be dealt with, on top of the emotional experience itself.

As an end-of-life doula, you can take some of the burden away, be there to hold their hand as well, and guide them towards the path of healing.

**Witness the Miracle and Mystery of Life and Death**

Who truly understands the mystery of life and death? Probably no one. But, as an end-of-life doula, you will witness the living making their final transition… making this wonderment especially strong.
“The biggest gift I have received is the profound understanding that I will never understand, that we are not meant to understand, that this miracle we call Life is a mystery and so is whatever comes next. My ‘work’ is to bow to the mystery and surrender to the divine.”

Rev. Olivia Bareham, 
Death Midwife, Home Funeral Guide, 
Celebrant, Conscious Dying Educator 
SacredCrossings.com

Be Your Own Boss and Define Your Own Career Path

As an end-of-life doula, you work for yourself. Yes, you work for your clients, but you decide what services to provide, you decide what you want your services to look like, and you decide how to deliver those services.

Many end-of-life doulas were once hospice volunteers, hospice nurses or healthcare workers, or otherwise working with people at the end of life, but in a different role or under the supervision of another organization. You may have felt frustrated that you couldn’t do certain things, or you didn’t have the time you wanted to fully support your patients.

When you start a business as an end-of-life doula, you now can decide how much time you spend by the bedside and can provide a wider range of care and support (within the scope and practice of the death doula role) than you possibly could have previously.

Be Constantly Reminded to Live Your Own Life Well

What better way to remember that every day is precious than to work with those who are near the end of life? People often ask the question, “If you knew you were going to die next week, or next month, or tomorrow... what would you do?” Those who work with death have this idea at the top of their minds on a continual basis. Not in a fearful or morbid way—but in an empowering, positive way. In a way that reminds them to live every day to its fullest!
“Working in the death positive community is incredibly gratifying. Death positive people are the most life-affirming people I know. We know life is fragile, and we spend our time well and wisely!”

Emily Pinzur, End-of-Life Doula
www.silverwheelhealing.com

Be Greatly Respected in Your Community

“I could never do what you do.” Be prepared to hear these words frequently when you introduce yourself to people. Not everyone is meant to work with people at the end of life, and not everyone has the emotional and spiritual wherewithal to sit by the bedside of the dying.

Death midwives and end-of-life doulas are well respected for their work. People know how vital the service is, they know what kind of impact you can have on the dying and their loved ones, and they know it’s not a role or job that just anyone can do.

Be Energized by Your Work and Filled With Gratitude

People may assume this work can be exhausting and overwhelming. But for those that love working with the dying, it is anything but that. Yes, of course, you will need to take time for yourself. It is soul-intense work. Self-care is a must. However, that’s not because the work depletes your soul. For many in this profession, working with the dying fills up their cup—it doesn’t empty it.

“I do not experience this work as emotionally draining; on the contrary, I feel fed and upheld and filled with gratitude.”

SacredCrossings.com

Be a Part of a Cultural Revolution

The death positive movement is about embracing death and dying, talking about death and not ignoring it, respecting people’s wishes at the end of life, not viewing the dead body as “dangerous” or
untouchable, and the belief that by personally being open about death and choices at the end of life, every individual can change the overall culture and attitude towards death.

End-of-Life doulas and death midwives are a huge part of the death positive movement. They aren’t just talking about what it means to have a “good death”—but helping people have one. When you as an individual become an end-of-life doula, you take a vital step towards changing the world’s attitudes around death and dying.

**Receive Financial Rewards While Working Your Passion**

Most end-of-life doulas get their start either by working with a family member or by volunteering in a hospice. In other words, they do this work for free. When you start an end-of-life doula business, you take your previous hobby and turn it into a career.

Whether you decide to go full speed and aim to do the work full-time, or you’re just looking to do death doula work on the side in addition to whatever you do full-time, either way, you will make money doing something you love. You will be providing a valuable service to others and making a difference in people’s lives (and deaths!), while earning an income that will allow you to continue to dedicate your time to this important work.

### 1.4 Inside This Guide

By purchasing this guide, you have already taken the first step towards starting a successful career as an end-of-life doula or death midwife. Are you ready to learn what you need to know to get started? The following pages will give you all the information, resources, and tools you need. You will learn about what end-of-life doulas do, how to gain and improve upon the skills you already have, how to start your business, and how to let your future clients know you’re here and you’re ready to serve them.

Chapter 2 (*What an End-of-Life Doula Does*) will teach you the essentials of death doula work. You will learn about the variety of specializations open to you, and why you may want to consider focusing on one or
a few of them. You will learn what kinds of tools and items you need to serve clients and offer physical, spiritual, and emotional comfort. You will learn how to be a better listener, how to “hold the space” for someone, and how to be fully present. (Skills, by the way, that you can use in all areas of your life.) You will learn how to do an initial client consultation and learn how you can be best of service to those that want to work with you. You’ll learn about the physical, emotional, practical, and spiritual needs of the dying, how to help your clients get those needs met, and how to provide support to the dying’s friends and family members. You’ll get ideas on how to start educating the public about death doula work and how to work alongside other dying professionals.

In Chapter 3 (Getting Ready), you’ll do a quick assessment of the skills you already have and start thinking about the skills you need to gain or improve upon. You will learn how to “learn by doing,” one of the best ways to gain skills as an end-of-life doula, and how to learn from others who are already in the end-of-life doula community. You will learn about the many educational opportunities for end-of-life doula and death midwifery training, learn what you need to know about gaining certification, and get an insider overview of some of the top end-of-life doula training programs. You’ll also get ideas on how to further expand your skills, and find resources for studying on your own.

In Chapter 4 (Starting Your Own Business), you’ll get the nitty-gritty details of what it takes to start a business, including how to create a business plan for success from the very start, what you need to know about legal structures, and how to handle the basics of making smart financial business decisions. You’ll learn how to set up your fees for your doula work, and what the average going rates are for death doula work. You’ll also learn about hiring support staff, something you may not be thinking about now, but in the future, as you gain more clients, this information will be invaluable.

In Chapter 5 (Getting Clients), you’ll learn about the essentials of marketing, and how to let the world know you are open and ready for business. You’ll learn how to get publicity for your death doula business both for free and for a fee. You’ll learn how to sell your services through networking and how to handle calls from interested clients. You’ll also learn about writing a contract for your death doula work.
Finally, in Chapter 6, you’ll get some last words of inspiration and encouragement, to get started in your new career.

After completing this guide, you will soon find yourself ready to start working as an end-of-life doula or death midwife. Let’s get started!

You have reached the end of the free sample of the *FabJob Guide to Become a Death Doula*. To order and download the complete guide go to [https://fabjob.com/program/become-death-doula/](https://fabjob.com/program/become-death-doula/).