



## Cornerstone Doula Trainings LLC aka Cornerstone Birthwork Training Code of Conduct

*\*Revised January 29, 2025*

*\*For clarity and continuity within this document, the title "Birthworker" will be used as a synonym for all titles associated with Cornerstone students and graduates of any Cornerstone training program.*

### **Your Role as a Cornerstone Birthworker**

Cornerstone Birthworkers are reproductive health support professionals who provide continuous physical, emotional, and educational care to all birthing people and gestational carriers, their partners, families, and communities throughout the reproductive lifespan. This includes support through fertility, live birth, loss, abortion, foster care, adoption, and CPS system involvement.

Beyond individual care, Cornerstone Birthworkers mobilize community resources—activating networks for mutual aid, shift coverage, pro bono support, and advocacy when circumstances require. Cornerstone Birthworkers also take care of one another, ensuring sustainability and long-term service to clients and communities.

Cornerstone defines birthwork as **human rights work, community support, and activism**. Birthworkers in our community are advocates and change-makers, working as integral members of the interprofessional reproductive care team and are not disempowered by systems of hierarchy and control.

The maternal health crisis in the U.S. is worsening, with Black, Indigenous, and People of the Global Majority experiencing disproportionately high rates of maternal morbidity and mortality. Cornerstone Birthworkers are committed to closing this gap through our collective work, leadership, education, and activism as birthworkers.

### **As Cornerstone Birthworkers, We Fully Commit To:**

#### **Doing the Work**

The internal work of anti-racism and anti-oppression is a lifelong action—every single action, every single day. Though we will facilitate this work externally in our trainings, your inner work is a lifetime project. Cornerstone expects that our Birthworkers will fully commit to identifying and deconstructing internal biases and racism, as well as interrupting discrimination and holding

racist systems accountable in order to create true change in the disparate maternal and infant morbidity and mortality rates in the U.S.

## **Recognizing, Acknowledging, and Leveraging Privilege**

*"Speak up, lift up, fall back." (Jenkins, Gomez, Harper & Romero, 2016)*

Cornerstone Birthworkers must examine their positionality through an intersectional lens and actively leverage their privilege intentionally and equitably. If you have more privilege than a colleague, client, or community member in relation to gender, sex, race, class, ability, age, education level, socioeconomic status, immigration status, sexual orientation, or other identities, you are expected to step back, uplift, and pass the mic.

This can include:

- Citing and paying People of the Global Majority (PGM) educators for their intellectual property, time, energy, and labor.
- Compensating mentors.
- Referring potential clients to more culturally appropriate Birthworker colleagues.
- Not intentionally trying to occupy spaces designed for PGM-only support or healing as a white person.
- Not relying on marginalized folks for emotional labor and education.
- Interrupting microaggressions and speaking out whenever you witness marginalization, racism, or oppression.

## **Upholding the Tenets of Reproductive Justice**

Reproductive Justice is a framework that was created and developed in the 1990s by Black women. Therefore, Cornerstone, as an organization with white leadership, does not call itself a Reproductive Justice organization. However, we work within the framework, uphold its tenets in our classrooms and communities, and give credit and thanks to its creators and developers.

*"SisterSong defines Reproductive Justice as the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities... To achieve reproductive justice, we must analyze power systems, address intersecting oppressions, center the most marginalized, and join together across issues and identities." (SisterSong, 2019)*

## **Respecting Cultural Practices Without Appropriation**

Cultural appropriation occurs when members of a dominant culture extract, use, or profit from the cultural traditions, practices, symbols, or tools of marginalized communities without consent, understanding, or reciprocity. This often involves stripping these traditions of their original context or significance and using them for personal gain, aesthetic appeal, or profit.

Appropriation is harmful because it reinforces systemic power imbalances, commodifies sacred or meaningful practices, and erases the contributions of the communities they originate from.

Cultural exchange, by contrast, is based on mutual respect, consent, and shared learning. It occurs when knowledge or traditions are shared intentionally by members of the originating culture, fostering cross-cultural understanding and preservation.

#### **Cornerstone Birthworkers commit to:**

- Seeking direct learning, mentorship, and permission from cultural keepers before engaging in practices that do not originate from their own culture.
- Honoring the sacredness of cultural traditions by not commodifying or commercializing them for personal benefit.
- Giving credit and compensating cultural keepers for sharing their knowledge and ensuring that practices are carried out respectfully and within their appropriate context.
- Continuously reflecting on their own positionality, asking: *Am I the right person to carry this tradition forward? Am I using it in a way that honors the community it comes from?*

By following these principles, we uphold the dignity and integrity of cultural traditions while fostering authentic, respectful connections with the communities we serve.

#### **Respecting Diverse Knowledge and Practices in Birthwork**

We are a diverse community, and within this diversity are many different beliefs, backgrounds, bodies of knowledge, and ways of practice. Cornerstone Birthworkers understand that traditional and ancestral knowledge holds as much value as science and evidence-based data.

Cornerstone Birthworkers will engage in respectful, nonviolent communication in all spaces, uplift one another, and listen and learn as much as they teach.

#### **Ethical Online Engagement**

Name-calling, trolling, harassment, or violent and disrespectful behavior toward a colleague or community member in online spaces will be grounds for removal and possible revocation of Cornerstone certification.

#### **Honoring All Reproductive Choices**

Cornerstone Birthworkers fully embrace all reproductive choices with respect and understanding. Every person has full autonomy over their body, their baby, and their birth.

#### **Providing Continuity of Care**

Cornerstone Birthworkers are 100% committed to the families they work with and ensure that they are available for every birth by not over-scheduling and by following our 36-43 week

hard-call practice guidelines. In the rare case of an emergency or the need for personal care, Birthworkers will have a backup that their clients have already met and feel comfortable with.

### **Practicing Confidentiality**

All client information gathered by Cornerstone Birthworkers is kept strictly confidential. Birthworkers will not share any protected health information (PHI)—such as medical diagnoses, histories, prescriptions, birth stories, or identifying details—without explicit written consent from the client.

The relationship between Birthworker and client is sacred and must be treated with the highest regard.

### **Providing Equitable Care**

Equity is about understanding that people have different needs and meeting those needs in ways that ensure everyone has access to the same level of care and outcomes. While equality assumes everyone starts on the same playing field, equity recognizes that systemic barriers disproportionately affect marginalized communities.

Cornerstone Birthworkers provide care that is tailored to each client's specific needs—addressing systemic and individual barriers to ensure just and fulfilling care. We commit to ensuring that regardless of a client's identities, the quality of care and access they receive are never compromised.

### **Practicing Self-Care and Community Care**

Self-care is inherent to birthwork, but the responsibility of care does not rest solely on the individual. We must care for each other, working in community to break cycles of isolation and separation.

At Cornerstone, self-care and community care go hand in hand. Self-care involves resting, nourishing ourselves, and taking intentional breaks. Community care extends this practice by ensuring that we actively support one another through mutual aid, collective rest, and shared responsibility. Birthwork thrives when we are cared for by our community, allowing us to sustainably serve others.

We commit to creating spaces where Birthworkers can thrive—not just recover from adversity but grow and transform within the work.

### **Providing Trauma-Informed Care**

"Trauma-informed care is a strengths-based approach grounded in an understanding of and responsiveness to the impact of trauma. It emphasizes physical, psychological, and emotional

safety for both providers and survivors and creates opportunities for survivors to regain a sense of control and empowerment." (Hopper, Bassuk, & Olivet, 2010)

Cornerstone Birthworkers understand that all people are survivors of trauma in some form and commit to offering care that acknowledges and responds to all types of trauma, including but not limited to acute trauma (T), chronic trauma (t), sexual trauma, environmental trauma, intergenerational trauma, and familial trauma.

We commit to:

- Creating emotionally and physically safe spaces.
- Advocating for clients in all settings.
- Holding ourselves and other providers accountable for obtaining explicit consent before providing any care.
- Recognizing how power and oppression exacerbate trauma responses.

This document outlines the expectations and standards that Cornerstone Doula Trainings upholds for every person who enters our classroom, whether or not they pursue certification. As this document is subject to updates and revisions, we will request a new signature whenever significant changes are made.

For those seeking certification through Cornerstone Doula Trainings, you will be required to complete all certification requirements and maintain current infant and child CPR/first aid certification. Periodic certification audits will be conducted to ensure that all certified Birthworkers remain in compliance with their requirements.

By signing this document, you are committing to practice as a Birthworker (or your chosen title) under the guidelines of this Code of Conduct. Cornerstone Doula Trainings reserves the right to terminate professional alliances and revoke certifications if a Birthworker does not consistently meet the standards outlined in this document.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Name printed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **References:**

Hopper, E. K., Bassuk, E. L., & Olivet, J. (2010). Shelter from the storm: Trauma-informed care in homeless service settings. *The Open Health Services and Policy Journal*, 3, 80-100.

Jenkins, J., Gomez, R., Harper, L., & Romero, A. (2016, November 8). Speak up, lift up, fall back: What we need from social justice allies. Retrieved from <https://diverseeducation.com/article/89078/>

## **Grievance and Incident Procedure**

### **Incident Review**

An **incident** refers to any potentially negative occurrence involving a Cornerstone Birthworker, either during client support or between Birthworkers or professional partners. Anyone directly involved in or witnessing the occurrence may report an incident. The purpose of an incident review is to uncover the facts, de-escalate conflicts, and recommend support or corrective measures focused on healing, accountability, and relationship repair.

### **Grievance Review Process**

A **grievance** is a formal complaint lodged against a Cornerstone Birthworker by a client, professional partner (e.g., another Birthworker, healthcare provider, or collaborator), caregiver, or community member. The grievance process aims to provide space for meaningful dialogue, uncover the root of the issue, and develop restorative solutions that repair harm while maintaining accountability.

### **Grievance Review Committee**

The Grievance Review Committee is composed of:

- **Three Cornerstone Birthworkers**
- **Two members of the Cornerstone Leadership Team**

The committee is committed to creating an environment where all parties are heard, with a focus on rebuilding trust and centering healing in the resolution process.

### **Grievance Review Steps**

1. **Submission of Complaint**
  - The grievance must be submitted in writing and include details such as dates, the involved parties, and a description of the issue. The complainant is encouraged to express any desired outcomes to help guide the restorative process.
2. **Initial Review and Assessment**
  - The committee will conduct an initial review to assess the nature of the grievance. If the grievance involves immediate harm or danger, appropriate interim measures may be taken to ensure safety.
3. **Documentation Gathering**

- Relevant documentation, such as statements, written communication, or other evidence, will be collected and reviewed to understand the context of the grievance.
4. **Transformative Mediation or Dialogue**
    - In many cases, a facilitated dialogue will take place between the parties involved, using principles of transformative justice. This process focuses on listening, de-escalating tensions, and fostering empathy to uncover the underlying harm and repair relationships.
  5. **Evaluation and Action Plan Development**
    - The committee will evaluate the situation and develop an action plan focused on restoring trust and addressing any systemic or individual issues that contributed to the harm. This plan will include steps for repair, reflection, and growth.
  6. **Confidentiality**
    - The grievance process is confidential, and any discussions or documents related to the review will remain within the committee.

## **Possible Outcomes Aligned with Transformative Justice**

The goal of the grievance process is to identify meaningful solutions that repair harm, restore relationships, and build accountability. Possible outcomes include:

- **Restorative dialogues or facilitated conversations** to rebuild understanding and trust.
- **Educational assignments or training** focused on developing greater awareness and accountability.
- **De-escalation strategies** to prevent future conflict.
- **Participation in a restorative or transformative justice circle.**
- **Mediation or professional mentorship** to guide personal and professional development.
- **A written agreement** outlining commitments to repair the harm and prevent recurrence.
- **Voluntary resignation** if the Birthworker determines they cannot meet the commitments of repair.
- **Certification revocation** as a last resort if other restorative efforts do not adequately resolve the issue.

## **Notification of Outcome**

Within 30 days of the review, the Grievance Committee will notify all involved parties in writing of the findings and any agreed-upon or recommended actions.

## **Appeals Process**

If a Birthworker disagrees with the outcome, they may submit an appeal in writing to the Cornerstone Leadership Team within 72 hours of receiving notice of the decision. The team will review the appeal and issue a final decision within 5 business days.

### **Automatic Revocation in Serious Cases**

In cases where significant harm has been caused, or where a Birthworker's actions directly contradict the core values of Cornerstone (e.g., violence, intentional harm, or severe breaches of trust), the Leadership Team reserves the right to revoke certification or terminate the Birthworker's professional affiliation without initiating a full grievance review.

This option will only be used when other restorative efforts are deemed inappropriate or ineffective due to the severity of the situation.

### **Transformative Justice and the Grievance Process**

Cornerstone Doula Trainings is committed to resolving conflicts in ways that prioritize healing, repair, and accountability. We recognize that conflict and harm are opportunities for growth when addressed with care and intention. Through transformative justice, we seek to move beyond punishment, instead focusing on rebuilding relationships, uncovering root causes, and preventing future harm.

To submit a grievance or report an incident, please email [info@cornerstonedoulatrainings.com](mailto:info@cornerstonedoulatrainings.com) with detailed information, including the date, involved parties, description of the occurrence, and any desired outcomes.