

Student Lead



The Invitation & the Role

Stillbirthday students who have a demonstrated ability to successfully complete their own tasks while also presenting essential character qualities during their training session are invited to become Student Leads in subsequent training sessions. Some of these qualities include: vulnerability and transparency, creative exploration, a marked depth of understanding through the materials, the ability to preserve this journey for fellow classmates seeking assistance through the training, quality leadership abilities, maturity through the very challenging materials, and the ability to offer encouragement to others.

At its simplest, the Student Lead position allows you an opportunity to have a leadership position that helps students feel connected to the materials and welcomed into the classroom. The class roster is divided among the total Student Leads, and you'll receive a small list of students for whom you'll be known as their Primary Student Lead. Each week you'll "tag" their name in the classroom in a general "check in" post where you'll simply let them know you're checking in on them and that they are invited to message you privately with any new challenges they are facing that week. You aren't a counselor and you won't provide answers. You'll simply listen and validate what they are feeling. You'll determine if their question is in reference to the training if it is one that you can invite the student to ask in the class itself, or if you'll guide them in finding the answer. You won't give answers away. That's it – that's the bulk of the role – to simply offer love.

This is what this Invitation Entails

The upcoming session will begin with all of the classmates being invited into the facebook group designated for them. Because the stillbirthday training is unique in that it validates each person's own unique birthing journey, but also their bereavement journey, many students coming into the training have a lot of fears resurfacing - "*Oh no! It's really starting! Am I good enough? Can I do this?*" And so starting the training session is much more than distributing materials but is a regrouping and reaffirming. In those earliest weeks I field a lot of re-enrolling and transferring needs and things like that. Because those individual situations require attention, the collective of the class is still looking for connection too - even though on a lighter level, they are still looking, and that need is still a very important one to fill. The role of Student Lead is like a gentle mentorship. Simple presence in the facebook group, and not mandatorily hovering or anything like that, but just simple presence. Julia demonstrates this gorgeously with her collection of inspiring photos and graphics with uplifting messages and quick little posts about reminders of self-care.

Examples

Student Leads also can field questions that are general in nature, and these are the questions that certainly not always, but, oftentimes, in my experience, a student is asking because within the question, is something the student is hoping is being said. Something like *"I'm on exam 3 and question 2 has me confused..."* There are a couple of things that I look at with questions like this. The first is that there is always a way to give clues, or reminders, or pointers, without literally giving the answer away. So as a Student Lead this would be how to help navigate a question like this, by encouraging the student and others reading it to explore the possibilities together. There are very few "precision required" questions in the training. I would go so far as to say that 90% of doula work isn't *what*, but *why* and *how*.

As in:

not *"What tasks am I supposed to do right now?"* but *"Why is this what is happening right now, why is this what the nurse is suggesting, why is there emotional dystocia in labor, why is mom saying she hates her husband?"* - and to follow up with that in serving, it's not even about answering the why, truly, but about applying the "how" to come alongside the "why".

As in:

"How can I offer something non-medically interventive to apply to what the nurse is seeing and is wanting to address? How can I support this family's philosophical and/or spiritual beliefs? How can I incorporate their living children? How can we unpack mom's disappointment at her birth outcome now that she's had a Cesarean birth that she was hoping to avoid?"

I say this, because the exam questions are designed in a similar way. The music and visual activity was not precision driven and a score based on the ability to find the hidden object. That would be the "what" - *"What this question said is what I have to find and do."* But rather, "why and how". As in: *"Why is this wild question in this exam? Because it seems really random. How do I feel about having to try to find a hidden image while listening to this strange music to what this training is about? How can I apply what this process has left me feeling with to the rest of the training experience?"*

So as students pose questions for additional assistance in the training, this is the journey they are on, and it's important to allow them that authentic discovery. Because even if they are not aware of what the process is offering them emotionally, mentally and rationally, the process is still occurring and it's important to stand guard to let them explore their space in this holistic and organic way.

The other part in addressing student questions for additional direction, is that often there is a statement in the question. We all have responsibilities, pressures, and needs outside of the training. A student might be a stressed out wife and mother who is feeling invalidated and ignored in every other area of her life right now. She might be unsure of what the training will do for her career and long-term, but she's investing in it anyway for herself and for the possibilities that might come. So when she poses *"I'm on exam 3 and stuck on question 2"* - what she might be saying is *"I am working really hard on this training, I take it seriously, and I am not meaning to rush ahead of the class, but I'm really hoping someone will see that I'm on exam 3 when we're in week 2 of training because I want someone just to tell me that they are impressed with my efforts."* So finding balance between affirming to her that she's doing great, while trying to reign in the potential for racing ahead - which can turn out to be really detrimental to the learning process and retaining information - while also being sensitive to the rest of the class who may feel vulnerable to inferiority by not being ahead - can really be a balance that requires tact and discernment. *"Great job plugging away! What are your thoughts on this question?"* is one way to start a dialogue about it together, and lets the students explore as well.

The social connections within the classroom are enriching but aren't required to complete the program. Students WANT to feel engaged, and so the role of Student Lead isn't time intensive, it isn't super formal or super structured, but just simple presence, is a SIGNIFICANT contribution to the sense of connection for the students. The Student Lead is a fairly small job but with a very BIG role.

The classmates can send Student Leads private messages, and they might for little things like *"I can't find how to answer this question"* - and Leads often responds to these questions by saying something similar to *"You know, that's a great question. If you're wondering that, I'll bet you're not alone in that, and someone else in the class might benefit if you pose that question for everyone to chime in on."* And that way the students have an opportunity to learn from one another.

Questions like, *"I'm still waiting on a response from my exam 4, can I move into the second semester or am I supposed to wait?"* would get fielded a little differently. For that, students can always keep moving forward, even if they're waiting on me. The password information for the second semester is within the modules of chapter 4 and within each module of the second semester. You can let them know they can move forward, and that you'll nudge me too about getting back with them.

Principles of Service for Leads

Student Leads agree to maintain a higher level of discernment and maturity in all public appearances and platforms including social media during your time serving as Lead. This means a consideration for the students who may be impressionable or not entirely certain that your personal opinion is not the official statement of stillbirth on a matter. Being mindful of your audience, you still maintain full right to your own opinions and statements; as a Lead you are simply receptive to communication from your Doula Advisory Team Leader and Heidi Faith in social media etiquette.

The Reason the Lead Role is Necessary

The value that you bring to the students and to their experience has already been addressed. But the Lead role serves as a help to me as well.

Class sessions are not isolated, boxed-in timeframes. Here's examples of what I mean:

- Because individuals register for a session often in time with an important milestone or they encounter an important event during the timeframe of their designated session, they are in need of more time to complete their work.
- An individual may have registered for a session several months ago and may have already begun their reading/book reviews portion of their work before the training session begins.
- An individual may have registered only days or even hours before the official opening of the session and so may need additional guidance from me in getting started.
- An individual may encounter a heightened milestone or circumstance during the course of their session and so is turning in work overlapping into a subsequent session.
- An individual may have chosen to formally re-enroll into a new session and may want to start fresh with all new exams.
- An individual may have chosen to formally re-enroll into a new session and may want to start turning in exams with where he or she left off in the first session.

Considerations in Heidi's Time Management

I am the only recipient of exam responses, and as such I bear the sole responsibility of a person's endorsement by stillbirth as a graduated doula. It is my responsibility not only to check that exams are received, but that through the collection of exams, they each reflect a consistent pattern of growing more deeply into the materials and a demonstrated pattern that reveals an understanding of the foundational expectations of a Birth & Bereavement Doula. Many of these exams require extended dialogue between the student and me. Each exam has an option for the student to request feedback regardless, and that is so that the student can determine his or her own emotional needs and to practice actually asking for validation, as our self-care and determining our own needs is something we convey to the families we serve and so we must know how to do as well. When an area arises that I believe a student could benefit from a more directive focus on, I email that individual privately and we begin to explore that part of the picture. Because the very first foundational role of a doula is to go slow, this is something I also need to offer to the student in the invitation to take a deeper look. The absolute, precision specific questions have one set of expectations, but the scenario questions and others like them that require a self-evaluation have a set of expectations as well, and I need to see how these all come together for the doula.

When I see a published question or comment, there are two avenues of responding. The question itself, and, the fact that it is published. For example, if a student posts "Where is Heidi? I need her to respond to me." I need to respond to the original question, and, there needs to be a response to the published question. The likelihood is, I am already in process of responding to the original question, and I continue to focus on that. I don't respond to published comments in a manner that can facilitate or promote a confrontational dialogue or in a defensive way. So often I might "like" a comment simply to indicate I've seen it, and then will continue in privately pursuing the core issue at hand.

Because some issues require further concentrated, confidential time, and because many of the students who enroll into our training have a great deal of enthusiasm, drive and passion, it is not a surprise that there are students in each session who seek to set the tone or environment of the classroom. There might be questions or comments that seem to challenge the training contents, or questions that start from the training contents and bring in situational experiences that you might not be familiar with, but which you are present for in the classroom and not sure how to respond. You might feel like you're scrambling to respond to neutralize the situation and resolve the issue.

I simply, humbly and honestly confess to you that I don't know everything. You don't know everything, and you are not expected to know everything.

I often leave these kinds of questions open in the classroom so that everyone can collaborate together. There is no entitlement of knowledge and no issues of superiority. We each bring value. Oftentimes a question can require a great deal of unpacking and slowing down to explore, which is something I can do in a response but obviously takes a great deal of time, which is already precisely what I'm doing in exams, and so leaving the question for the whole class to mull over and contemplate offers everyone the exact experience of going slow and learning how to validate. It's often not in one single person's response, but is the culmination of the entire conversation that is ultimately what I hope each person to gain from experiencing.

One question that does come up is when I credential doulas. In week 8, the student has the choice not only of general feedback, but of receiving a letter of completion of the 8 weeks of online training, and/or an exit interview, where he or she can have a virtual meeting with me and we can practice role-playing or just have a time to connect. This session is 1 hour long and can be at any time, ever, after the 8 weeks are completed. Most students waive these options because they are already so close to completing the book reviews and community project. Those who do complete all of their work before the end of session (because for example, they've read their books before the class began), do not receive their credential until the 8th week. I discourage students racing ahead and is something that a student and I unpack together if I find that they are turning in exams sooner than the rest of the class.

When Your Response Might Improve

Because it might happen, and it's totally OK. If you say something that I feel needs to be expanded on or I feel isn't as accurate as it could be, what I often generally do is message the original questioner and I message you, both, separately, the corrected information. I begin with something like "That's right, and this is important too....." In the occasion that I feel that the time and audience are a factor to be considered and I respond within the conversation, I do with the most amount of consideration to everyone's feelings as possible.

If something happens in the course of your role as Student Lead that isn't in line with the spirit or goal of Student Leads, we'll navigate that situation as tactfully and confidentially as possible. It is important to maintain connection and encouragement to the class and to one another, as lots of really big feelings and patterns, cycles and glimpses of each student's own journeys become present through the time together and it's not unlikely that a student may challenge any of us or seek to break down our communications, patience or discernment. I'll need you to be receptive to feedback and mentorship.

Compensation

The Student Lead position is a *voluntary* role of companioning students along their training session. You can apply and serve in multiple sessions, but each session is voluntary and you'll agree to complete the responsibilities throughout the session. There are no financial or in-kind benefits to your role, and you may not use your role as a platform for advocating or marketing any service or product or any external business or organization. We need to remain in compliance with the structure of the training program. If an event or responsibility outside of the session is paramount and you need to step away from the session for more than a couple of days, you'll need to let the other Leads know. This holds us all to an accountability, and it lets the other Leads keep an eye on the students who are leaning on you for companionship, and, it lets us also offer to you any encouragement or love you may be in need of. You are likely to be the first to know of plans for upcoming doula events and opportunities, and you might become a trusted source of information about the training from outside sources. The compensation of becoming a Lead truly is in the wonderful friendships you can form. As such, you agree to maintain the highest amount of confidentiality, integrity and honor among the Leads of the session.

In Conclusion

That's really the bulk of the role of Student Lead. We're wanting to build a team of 8 Leads per session, and we have a private facebook group where the Student Leads can connect with one another. It will be a great way to field questions together and build a strong sense of connection with one another.

This training program is entirely unique and that brings with it entirely uncharted terrain. So we each parallel the doula's journey by demonstrating our own abilities to be vulnerable, imperfect yet enduring, sometimes clumsy stumblers yet mighty trailblazers, makers of mistakes and holders of hopes.

The role of Student Lead can substantially impact a student's journey by being a validator, by bearing witness to the journey and the fundamental worthiness of the person.

And so, you have been personally selected and this opportunity is presented to you.

Whether you accept the offer to Lead or not, I promise I don't want you to feel pressured or obligated to perform, but I hope you see this offer as a great compliment to you, and if you'd like to Lead in this upcoming session you can let me know and we'll add you to the Student Lead group where we can start settling into the role together.

With Great Gratitude and Deep Admiration,

Heidi Faith