

A close-up photograph of a woman with dark, curly hair, smiling and looking down at a baby she is breastfeeding. The woman is wearing a light-colored top and a white cloth is draped over her shoulder. The baby is wearing a grey shirt and is looking up at the woman. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green and white.

Building a Breastfeeding- Friendly Environment in Your Faith Community

September 2019



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Communities of faith are important advocates of health, especially in communities affected by health disparities. Faith community leaders and lay members have a unique opportunity to influence social norms and encourage healthy behaviors, such as breastfeeding.

Suggested citation: Eat Smart, Move More North Carolina. 2019. *Building a Breastfeeding-Friendly Environment in Your Faith Community*. Raleigh, North Carolina.

Benefits of Breastfeeding¹

Research studies show that breastfed babies:

- Are less likely to die from sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)
- Have fewer ear infections and respiratory infections
- Have fewer digestive problems and are less likely to be constipated
- Are less likely to develop cancer or diabetes in their lifetime
- Are less likely to be obese later in life

Research studies show that moms who breastfeed:

- Burn up to 500 calories a day
- Enjoy a special bond with their baby
- Produce hormones that help to reduce stress
- Are less likely to develop breast cancer or ovarian cancer
- Are less likely to develop diabetes and cardiovascular disease

African-American children are 16% less likely to have ever been breastfed compared to white children.² Increasing support for breastfeeding within peer, family, faith and social networks may lead to more African-American women choosing to breastfeed.



“Given the importance of breastfeeding on the health of mothers and children, it is critical that we take action to support breastfeeding. Women who choose to breastfeed face numerous barriers—only through the support of family, communities, clinicians, healthcare systems, and employers will we be able to make breastfeeding the easy choice.”

Jerome M. Adams, MD, MPH U.S. Surgeon General

How Can Family Members Help?

Support from family and community members can greatly impact if and for how long a mother will choose to breastfeed. Encourage the whole family to support mothers as they go through their breastfeeding journey. Families can:

- Prepare meals and help with common household tasks such as housework and laundry so moms can get the rest she needs.
- Clean baby's diaper bag and restock it with fresh diapers and clothing.
- Clean breast pump parts so mom can focus on baby and other important tasks.
- Provide words of encouragement when things might get tough.
- Babies grow quickly, try to prioritize family time by doing things everyone enjoys.



Supporting Breastfeeding in Communities of Faith

More than three out of every four women choose to breastfeed their baby, but 60% stop breastfeeding sooner than they planned.² Faith communities can help honor a mother's decision to breastfeed by building a breastfeeding-friendly environment within their organization. They can provide a supportive setting and encourage breastfeeding by creating spaces for mothers to breastfeed or feed their babies, establish a mother's support group to help women build community and encourage women to breastfeed in ways that are culturally sensitive and appropriate.

Faith Community Support

Building a breastfeeding-friendly environment will require the support of members within the faith community. Their encouragement and positive reinforcement can mean so much to breastfeeding mothers. Faith community members can:

- Provide information about breastfeeding and infant feeding for parents, so they are able to make the best decision for their family about how to feed their baby.
 - Print copies of the Making it Work Toolkit for mothers who are breastfeeding and going back to work: workwellinc.com/resource/BreastfeedingToolkit_Moms.pdf
- Encourage mothers to continue breastfeeding for as long as they wish.
- Help parents get the rest they need. Breastfeeding is hard work, help mothers get the food she needs to keep her energy up.

- Babies grow so quickly, encourage families to prioritize time spent together doing something everyone enjoys.
- Encourage mothers to get help if they have questions or concerns with breastfeeding. To find support from a peer counselor, lactation consultant, or other professional, ask the local hospital or health department for information, or visit:
 - ncbfc.org/perinatal-region-map to find resources near where you live.
 - ilca.org to find a lactation consultant from the International Lactation Consultant Association.
- Create support groups for parents to help them navigate the challenges and joys of parenting, including breastfeeding.
- Normalize conversations about mental health and well-being. If you know of a mother who is struggling, encourage her to get help from a trained mental health professional.

Did You Know?

About 15–20% of all new moms experience significant sadness, anxiety, or depression in the year following a new baby. If she is struggling, she is not alone, and talking to someone is important. Encourage her to discuss her feelings with her primary care provider. With their help she can find the right counseling, support group, medications, or coping strategies that will help her to feel better soon. For more information on postpartum depression, visit: postpartum.net.

Clergy Care Support

Clergy can also provide support and services to parents through caregiving, in sermons or talks, and by creating an encouraging environment in the faith community that provides parents with the resources they need. Clergy can:

- Normalize breastfeeding. Encourage mothers to breastfeed wherever they feel most comfortable. Many congregations support breastfeeding in one's seat and find it to be more comfortable and less disruptive than a mother leaving the service in order to breastfeed.
 - Consider adding rocking chairs for parents in the worship space. This allows mothers to be close to their children during services.
- Learn about breastfeeding, infant feeding and infant health to motivate your faith community to support breastfeeding, a mothers' right to breastfeed, and overall maternal and infant well-being.
- Share messages about breastfeeding, maternal, and infant health during services or in written materials.
- Adopt a breastfeeding-friendly policy. For examples see page 7 of this guide.
- Model supportive breastfeeding behaviors. For example, inform your congregation that breastfeeding is welcomed. Support and encourage staff members who plan to or are currently breastfeeding.
- If appropriate for your faith community, hang a sign or poster in a visible place indicating mothers are welcome to nurse while in your facilities.

- Let parents know that “children and babies” are welcome in your faith community by posting welcoming messages in bulletins, programs, or on signs.
- Encourage families to talk with one another and support each other—particularly those who might be new to breastfeeding. A mentoring program or support group could go a long way to let mothers know they are loved and supported in your community.
- Share information about breastfeeding with internal and external partners. Faith-based communities have a long history for advocating for families including their right to breastfeed.
 - Offer to host nonprofit breastfeeding advocacy meetings, such as La Leche League.
- Invite breastfeeding professionals in to offer breastfeeding classes for moms, partners, or grandparents. To find support from a peer counselor, lactation consultant, or other professional, ask the local hospital or health department for information, or visit:
 - ncbfc.org/perinatal-region-map to find resources near where you live.
 - ilca.org to find a lactation consultant from the International Lactation Consultant Association.
- Participate in breastfeeding awareness campaigns like National Breastfeeding Month (August), Black Breastfeeding Week (last week of August) or World Breastfeeding Week (August 1–7).
- Recognize resources for women who might be struggling with motherhood and need additional support. For more information on postpartum depression, visit: postpartum.net.



Sample Breastfeeding-Friendly Policy³

_____ is committed to both the spiritual and the physical
(YOUR CONGREGATION'S NAME)
well-being of our members. It is important for our congregation to recognize and support a family's
decision to breastfeed and offer a positive environment for mother and child.

As people of faith, we are called to care for the health and well-being of ourselves, our neighbors and our
community. Therefore;

_____ believes it is important to have a policy to promote an
(YOUR CONGREGATION'S NAME)
environment that is positive and supports nursing mothers and their children.

_____ encourages its leaders, staff and congregation to
(YOUR CONGREGATION'S NAME)
support our members and visitors nursing their children while in our facility.

_____, its leaders, staff and members will make a reasonable
(YOUR CONGREGATION'S NAME)
effort to provide a clean, comfortable, private space (excluding any restroom area) to accommodate
mothers nursing their children.

_____ pledges to include information on the benefits of
(YOUR CONGREGATION'S NAME)
breastfeeding in our health education efforts.

Signature of Faith Leader

Date

Signature of Health Ministry Coordinator

Date

Signature of Breastfeeding-Friendly Champion

Date

Suggestions for a Breastfeeding-Friendly Space³

Encourage parents to breastfeed anywhere they feel comfortable. Some parents may feel more comfortable feeding in a private space. Consider creating a breastfeeding-friendly space for women who are breastfeeding or parents who need space to feed or spend time with their babies.



BASIC

- Clean, private space with room divider or door—excluding restroom areas. Could be a multipurpose space.
- Chair with arms or “C” shaped pillow (normally less than \$50).
- Hand sanitizer/paper towels.
- Door hanger/signage to indicate when room is available/in use.



BETTER

- Access to sink, soap, water, small refrigerator to store milk, and paper towels.
- Clean, private room for only breastfeeding women excluding restroom space.
- A room large enough to hold several users comfortably.
- One or more glider/rocking chair for comfortable seating.
- Audio/video connection to service or activity.
- Signage in common areas indicating location of breastfeeding-friendly space(s).



If You'll Be Caring for the Baby

Many faith communities offer childcare to parents who are attending worship services or events. If people in your faith community plan to help with the baby, here are some tips to make it easier and more rewarding.

Feeding a Breastfed Baby

- Breastfed babies eat when they are hungry and stop when they are full. Follow baby's hunger signals rather than a schedule.
- Breastfed babies may eat less at each feeding, and eat more often. This is because human milk is digested very easily. They also take different amounts at each feeding.
- Many breastfed babies need time and patience learning to take milk from anything other than the breast.
- If you'll be using a bottle to feed baby, try offering it when baby is not so hungry or upset, or when baby is still a little sleepy.
- Running some warm water over the bottle nipple may also help; breastfed babies are not used to cold nipples.
- For more information on Responsive Feeding, visit: sph.unc.edu/cgbi/responsive-feeding.
- Breastfed babies are used to being held and feeling the closeness of mom's skin when feeding. Hold baby close when feeding a bottle. Rather than pushing the nipple into baby's mouth, touch baby's lower lip and wait for him/her to open his/her mouth and draw it in.
- Never prop a bottle or leave baby alone during a feeding.
- Babies love to snuggle. Don't be surprised if baby acts hungry after the feeding. Baby may not need more food, but more closeness. See if another activity, like walking, playing, or snuggling, will comfort the baby before offering more milk.

Supporting Mom

- If you are only watching the baby for an hour or two, try not to give baby a full feeding. Mom's breasts may feel very full and she may want to breastfeed right away. Talk with her when she drops the baby off for care so that you know when she would like for you to feed him or her.
 - If baby is getting hungry, try to calm him/her in other ways, or just offer a very small amount to take the edge off before mom arrives.
- If mom will be traveling home after picking up baby from you, provide her space to breastfeed before she leaves.
- For more ideas, visit wicbreastfeeding.fns.usda.gov/friends-and-family.

How to Handle Human Milk

It is okay to handle human milk. It is food for baby that is full of infection-fighting ingredients, so you do not need to wear gloves or take special precautions.



Human milk does not look like formula. It may appear watery, have a bluish tint, or may look yellow when frozen. The cream will rise to the top of the milk during storage. Gently shake the milk to mix it together before feeding it to the baby.

Human milk can be stored in a refrigerator or freezer, and thawed as needed to meet the needs of baby. Carefully follow the guidelines for handling human milk below. Breastfeeding moms work hard to express their milk, and it is too valuable to waste!



Guidelines for Handling and Storing Human Milk^{4, 5}

Location	Duration Good for:	Guidance
Countertop, table	up to 4 hours if fresh; 1–2 hours if thawed, previously frozen	Cover containers and keep them as cool as possible; covering the container with a cool towel may keep milk cooler.
Insulated cooler bag	up to 24 hours	Keep ice packs in contact with milk containers at all times, limit opening cooler bag.
Refrigerator	up to 4 days if fresh; up to 1 day if thawed, previously frozen	Store milk in the back of the main body of the refrigerator.
Freezer		
Freezer compartment of a refrigerator	up to 2 weeks	Store milk toward the back of the freezer, where temperature is most constant. *Milk stored for the maximum amount of time listed is safe, but some of the lipids in the milk break down resulting in lower quality.
Freezer compartment of refrigerator with separate doors	up to 6* months	
Separate deep freezer, chest or upright	up to 12* months	

Remember⁴

- If there is unfrozen milk, use that first. If you are using frozen milk, be sure it is still good based on the guidelines for storing and handling. Also check to see if there is milk that is close to expiring that needs to be used first.
- If you will be adding fresh milk to a container of frozen milk, refrigerate it first since fresh milk is warm and can cause frozen milk to begin thawing.
- Thaw frozen milk in the refrigerator or by swirling in a bowl of warm water. NEVER microwave breast milk.
- Once milk is warmed, use it immediately, and only for one feeding.
- Discard any milk left in the bottle after baby's feeding.
- Do not re-freeze milk once it has been thawed.



WIC Helps!

For more breastfeeding information visit:
nutritionnc.com/edres/index.htm
or reach out to your local WIC agency
nutritionnc.com/wic/directory.htm

For more information about caring for a breastfed baby, check out the entire **Making It Work Tool Kit**.

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Sections of this guide have been adapted from New York State Department of Health and South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control original toolkits.

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