

## Strategy 7. Access to Breastfeeding Education and Information

### Definition

Breastfeeding education usually occurs during the prenatal and intrapartum periods. It should be taught by someone with expertise or training in lactation management. It may be offered in a hospital or clinic setting, as well as at libraries, community centers, churches, schools, and work sites. Education primarily includes information and resources. First-time mothers report that they find books and written information helpful, while experienced women often rely on their past experience and doctors.<sup>75</sup> Although the audience is usually pregnant or breastfeeding women, it may include fathers and others who support the breastfeeding mother.

The goals of breastfeeding education are to increase mothers' knowledge and skills, help them view breastfeeding as normal, and help them develop positive attitudes toward breastfeeding.

### Rationale

In the United States, many new mothers do not have direct, personal knowledge of breastfeeding. They also may find it hard to rely on family members for consistent, accurate information and guidance about infant feeding.<sup>40</sup> Even though many women have a general understanding of the benefits of breastfeeding, they may not have access to information about how it is done, and they may receive incorrect information.<sup>33</sup>

found education especially effective if it was personalized for each woman's needs.<sup>76</sup> An earlier 2003 review by the USPSTF found that the use of printed breastfeeding information alone (such as pamphlets, books, and posters) had no effect on breastfeeding initiation or duration in the short term.<sup>77</sup> However, printed materials are often used as a component of multifaceted breastfeeding interventions, which have been shown through a Cochrane review to effectively increase breastfeeding initiation and duration.<sup>35</sup>

### Evidence of Effectiveness

A 2008 review by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) found formal breastfeeding education alone to be ineffective in increasing rates of breastfeeding initiation or duration. However, when used as part of a multicomponent intervention, both prenatal and postnatal education had an effect on short-term exclusive breastfeeding and the duration of any breastfeeding.<sup>36</sup>

A 2005 Cochrane review that looked at five studies that involved primarily low-income women found that education resulted in a significant increase in the number of women who initiated breastfeeding; subgroup analysis





## Key Considerations

- Women have different educational needs depending on their stage of pregnancy and past experience. Written information is sufficient for some women, but others need more formal education.
- For quick answers to many breastfeeding questions, education programs can refer pregnant and breastfeeding women to reputable hotlines, Web sites, and social media tools. They also can give out videos, pamphlets, tear-off information sheets, books, and posters.
- Many classes that include breastfeeding instruction are held at community-based organizations, community centers, birth centers, and hospitals. Many hospital-based classes include information about early feeding practices and how to prepare for the infant's birth that is directly tied to the policies at that particular hospital.
- Breastfeeding education during the intrapartum period is extremely time sensitive. It occurs in a hospital setting and is often less formal than prenatal education.
- All hospitals that routinely handle births should have staff with adequate training and knowledge to help with breastfeeding education during the intrapartum period for all mothers.

## Program Examples

### WIC Baby Behavior Program

This program helps WIC participants exclusively breastfeed their infants longer by making sure they understand typical infant behaviors, including sleep patterns, cues, and crying. The content for the program came from information collected during a series of focus groups, which revealed that many mothers supplemented breastfeeding with formula and cereals because they misinterpreted common infant behaviors as

### Breastfeeding Education

Prenatal breastfeeding education includes the following:

- Guidance for mothers about anticipated situations and signs of effective breastfeeding or breastfeeding problems.
- The benefits of breastfeeding to mother, baby, and society.
- Correct positioning to help the infant latch onto the breast effectively.
- Specific needs in the early days of breastfeeding.
- Resources for help with problems.
- Common fears, concerns, problems, and myths.

Intrapartum breastfeeding education includes the following:

- Immediate issues such as correct latch and positioning.
- Adequate milk removal.
- Stability of the infant.
- Comfort of the mother.
- Concerns of mothers and family members.
- Referrals for postpartum support.
- Signs of success or potential problems in the first few days after hospital discharge.

indicators of hunger. Trained WIC staff members teach parents to recognize and respond to the range of cues given by infants (not just those related to hunger) and to understand that it is normal and healthy for young infants to wake up often. By promoting realistic expectations of infant behavior, WIC staff members give mothers options other than the use of formula or foods to respond to their infants' behavior.



### **Early Childhood Family Education**

The Minnesota Department of Education has integrated breastfeeding into its Early Childhood Family Education classes, which are part of a 35-year parenting program available to all Minnesota residents. School districts advertise the classes, which are taught by early childhood and parenting educators who cover parenting topics and child development and health from birth to age 3 years.

Class information is also available on the Minnesota Parents Know Web site. Information on breastfeeding includes the health benefits of breastfeeding, maternity care practices that support breastfeeding, basic breastfeeding information, signs that your baby is feeding well, and where to get help with breastfeeding.

### **Kaiser Permanente of Southern California**

Kaiser Permanente of Southern California offers patients a range of breastfeeding support services, including a breastfeeding helpline, support groups, and individual and group lactation consultations. New mothers also have access to general breastfeeding instruction, and at some facilities, classes specifically for mothers returning to work. Hospital policies

call for formal education to be reinforced with educational materials and one-on-one interaction with members of the patient's health care team. These interactions allow mothers and family members to ask specific questions about breastfeeding or how to deal with social norms surrounding breastfeeding in their family or community.

### **La Leche League International**

The LLLI operates a toll-free telephone helpline (1-800-525-3243) from 9 am to 5 pm CST. It is answered by a person who refers callers to specially trained mothers in their area. The LLLI also has an online help form that women can use to get answers to breastfeeding questions ([http://www.llli.org/help\\_form](http://www.llli.org/help_form)).

### **Text4baby**

This information service sends free text messages about maternal and child health to the cell phones of pregnant women and new mothers. It is supported by the National Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Coalition. Women sign up for the service by texting BABY (or BEBE for Spanish) to 511411. They receive free, short text messages each week, timed to the baby's due date or date of birth.

## **Action Steps**

1. Evaluate how breastfeeding education may be integrated into public health programs that serve new families, such as Early Intervention; Early Head Start; Success by Six; and family planning, teen pregnancy, and women's health clinic programs.
2. Partner with local community groups that support breastfeeding mothers by providing educational seminars and classes.
3. Work with childbirth educators to include evidence-based breastfeeding education in their curricula.
4. Promote and support breastfeeding classes that are convenient for family members to attend.
5. Work with health plans to encourage them to routinely offer prenatal classes on breastfeeding to all members.



### **Office on Women's Health**

The HHS's Office on Women's Health offers a telephone support line (1-800-994-WOMAN) and online breastfeeding support (<http://www.womenshealth.gov/breastfeeding/index.cfm>). The specialists who staff the support line are trained in breastfeeding management. Other resources include a publication entitled *Your Guide to Breastfeeding*, which is available free in three languages (English, Spanish, and Chinese) and in versions for different audiences (the general public, African American women, and Native American women).

### **Resources**

#### **Breastfeeding Made Simple**

This interactive, multimedia Web resource provides information for breastfeeding mothers. <http://www.breastfeedingmadesimple.com>

#### **Bright Future Lactation Resource Centre Ltd.**

Guidance and training for people who develop and conduct educational seminars on breastfeeding. <http://www.bfirc.info>

#### **Kaiser Permanente of Southern California**

Information about breastfeeding classes offered at Kaiser Permanente facilities. <https://healthy.kaiserpermanente.org/health/care/consumer/health-wellness>

#### **La Leche League International**

Information, resources, and a list of locations where breastfeeding mothers can find support. <http://www.lalecheleague.org>

#### **Minnesota Parents Know**

*Minnesota Department of Education*  
Find out more about the state's Early Childhood Family Education classes for parents, which include information on breastfeeding. [http://parentsknow.state.mn.us/parentsknow/Newborn/topicsAZ/PKDEV\\_000282](http://parentsknow.state.mn.us/parentsknow/Newborn/topicsAZ/PKDEV_000282)

#### **Text4baby**

Learn more about Text4baby and sign up to receive free educational texts and reminders. <http://www.text4baby.org>

#### **WomensHealth.gov**

*U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women's Health*  
Tips and suggestions to help women breastfeed successfully. <http://www.womenshealth.gov/breastfeeding/index.cfm>

#### **WIC Baby Behavior Program**

*U.S. Department of Agriculture*  
Web site includes materials and a report on this program for WIC participants. [http://www.nal.usda.gov/wicworks/Sharing\\_Center/gallery/FitWICBaby.htm](http://www.nal.usda.gov/wicworks/Sharing_Center/gallery/FitWICBaby.htm)