

Making learning about breastfeeding easy, fun and accessible

As a professional who works with new mothers and babies, the teaching you do, formal or informal, is one of the most important aspects of your work. Whether you realize it or not, you are teaching constantly. Make the most of each opportunity!

Set an example

What you say, how you phrase it and when you say it have a big impact, a few words of encouragement, a open ended question or a timely response to a patient's question. If you are unsure of the proper response to a question, find the answer. No one expects you to have all of the answers. Use your resources: reference books and experienced people. Are there pictures of breastfeeding mothers, brochures on breastfeeding topics in your rooms? Are there places for breastfeeding mothers, and staff, to breastfeed or use a breast pump in comfort and privacy? This says "we value breastfeeding here".

Plan a class

Plan a class to fit the needs of your audience. It may be a 10 minute presentation on a focused topic presented several times throughout the day. It may be a formal two hour or longer breastfeeding class. It might be a mini-series of several topics presented at consecutive classes.

If you have a waiting room setting, use that time to educate your patients. Provide a continuous loop video, power-point presentation or slide show to help mothers choose to breastfeed or to learn breastfeeding techniques. Have brochures and booklets available.

Just-in-time learning

In industry, just-in-time deliveries are the new approach. Materials arrive just as they are needed. No storage problems, no inventory. We can use this model for our teaching. Trying to teach everything needed in one class or in one setting, can be overwhelming and reduces retention of content. For parents, the stress of learning a new role, new tasks and being physically uncomfortable, can all impede learning. Parents need small bits of information, when they can absorb it and when they can put it to use right away.

Keeping the learning targeted and focused means better retention. However, it does require some coordination. Work with other professionals that will serve your mothers, to determine what they will be teaching and what aspects of teaching you need to cover. If each professional incorporates a little breastfeeding teaching in their contact with the mother, our mothers will be successful with breastfeeding!

Repetition

Although too much repetition is boring and irritating, a review of previously taught information can help cement it in the learners mind. If the verbal instruction is reinforced with a handout and then the actual activity is practiced with some timely feedback, it *will* be re remembered.

Examples of just-in-time learning for patients

Early pregnancy

Discussion of why to choose breastfeeding

Mid-to-late pregnancy

Advantages of breastfeeding

Timing of first feeding

Positioning, latch-on and timing of feedings

In-hospital

Review of positioning, latch-on and timing of feedings

Anticipatory guidance for the first 2-3 weeks including growth spurts, signs of a good feeding, parameters for adequate output, danger signs of inadequate intake

First month

Review of signs of a good feeding, parameters for adequate output, danger signs

Trouble shooting for problems that come up

Maintaining a breastmilk supply

Beyond the second month

Trouble shooting for problems that come up

Maintaining a breastmilk supply

Working and breastfeeding, breast pumps, if appropriate

Weaning (later)

Review your handouts

Review your handouts or videos for accurate content. Check that illustrations match the text and are technically accurate. Is there a focus on problems? Does the text suggest that breastfeeding may not work? Are there unrealistic expectations for the mother's diet, life style or use of medications or alcohol? Does the illustration make the mother look worried or tired? Does the piece make formula feeding the norm and breastfeeding seem like the exception? Is successful breastfeeding in conflict with the publishers business?

Audio-Visual Aids

You might incorporate slides, overheads, Power-Point Presentations, videos or a game in your teaching. Involve your audience: it improves retention. Using a variety of media and teaching styles to keep your class interesting and lively.

People learn in a variety of ways: seeing, hearing, doing and touching. Incorporate several ways of learning each topic to make sure you reach all of your students. Since visual and auditory learning accounts for about 70% of learners, be sure to use pictures or objects (dolls, breast pumps, other



equipment) as you talk. A breastfeeding class where moms bring their new babies and actually practice in class would be the "ultimate" audio-visual aid!

Bringing in a guest speaker adds variety and a personal interest. Successful breastfeeding mothers make the information "real".

Teaching professionals

Although professionals need greater depth in the information you provide, the same principles apply. Information that can be applied to the work-setting immediately is best retained.

In addition, professionals may find it hard to squeeze class time into their busy schedules. Early morning, lunch-time or mini-sessions may be best attended. Classes can be repeated so all staff can attend. That will help improve the consistency of advice given. Self learning modules (http://www.LERon-line.com/Self_Learning_New1.htm) provide learning opportunities when time allows, on duty or at home.

