

Breastfeeding gives a headstart in education

Breastfeeding enhances optimal brain development provided by nutrients and interaction

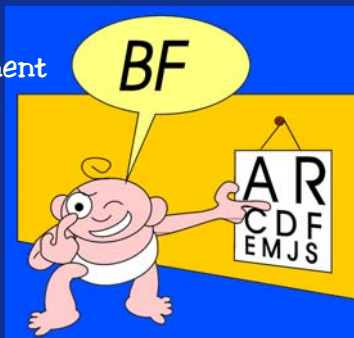


Breastfeeding protects babies from illnesses that can cause malnutrition, learning and hearing difficulties



Breastfeeding ensures frequent interaction and exposes babies to language, positive social behaviour and significant stimuli

Breastfeeding enables better visual development and visual acuity leading to reading and learning readiness



Why is it important to provide breastfeeding education?

Cultural, emotional and social forces shape our attitudes early in our lives. Families, friends and teachers influence beliefs about what is or is not acceptable. For children to develop a positive attitude toward breastfeeding, we must help them learn from an early age why it is a good choice for mothers and their infants and why we need to help and support them.

Formal and informal education gives children, youth and adults numerous opportunities to obtain correct information about breastfeeding. Breastfeeding information can be easily incorporated into subjects such as science, biology, family studies, nutrition, and home economics. Creative educators can also incorporate breastfeeding issues into math, art, social studies, history, marketing, business, ecology and even engineering. Since male and female attitudes affect societal norms, it is necessary to educate all children equally about breastfeeding.

Developing critical thinking skills and applying them to breastfeeding issues help children, youth and adults to examine the advantages and disadvantages of various feeding practices, form their own opinions and make informed choices. Learners become aware of pressures from advertisers who promote bottle-feeding, of how careers and breastfeeding can go together and the kind of support breastfeeding women need from society and employers. They will be better able to make informed decisions in their own lives.



Are you living in a breastfeeding-friendly culture?

Is breastfeeding presented either as the equivalent of bottle-feeding or as something *for those who cannot afford anything 'better'* and *for women who do not work*. In preparation for WBW, look around and assess whether such simplistic and misleading messages are promoted in your mass media or in schools:

- Are health professionals taught that there are few if any significant differences between human milk and infant formula?
- Do textbooks or children's books show mothers, fathers, or nurses giving bottles as if this is the normal way to feed babies?
- Are bottles or pacifiers used as symbols for babies, for example in birth congratulation greeting cards or public rooms for changing and feeding babies?
- Are mothers asked not to breastfeed in public?
- Are parents encouraged to put their babies to sleep alone from an early age?
- Do baby dolls come with bottles? Are there other toys that promote bottle-feeding as the cultural norm?
- Are early separation and "independence" of the baby promoted as positive values and bottles and pacifiers as ways to make separation easier?

If you answered 'yes' to most of the above questions, you are living in a breastfeeding-ignorant culture.