

Mother's Milk, Mother's Wisdom
Discussion Guide
(For Parents- Breastfeeding Class)

The role of healthcare providers in breastfeeding support:

1. When Sumitra had her baby, Levi, more than two months premature, a nurse said to her, "Don't worry, most moms will never be able to breastfeed their preemies; it's just too hard." What impact do you think statements and attitudes from healthcare providers has on parents' success with meeting their breastfeeding goals? What has your experience been with support from your healthcare providers during pregnancy, and as you make your plans for the birth?

2. Dr. McCue told us about a mantra she learned from a client that she shares with families she works with: "I can. I will. Just watch me!". She tells clients, "I'll be right there with you. I believe in you." What impact do you feel it would have for you to have a healthcare provider with this belief and attitude as you learn to feed your baby?

3. Dr. Duane said the sooner a pediatrician or family physician can connect parents breastfeeding support, the better. Through your interviews with potential pediatric care providers, what have you learned about the support they offer for feeding or lactation issues? What issues in a breastfeeding mother-baby pair would cause them to refer you on for increased lactation support?

Healthcare providers may consider referring patients for skilled breastfeeding support when there is persistent nipple or breast pain, difficulty latching, engorgement, a baby with low diaper output, inadequate weight gain, very long (>45 mins) or very short (<5 mins) feedings, jaundiced or very sleepy baby, premature infants (particularly at and after discharge), medical issues in the mother that may present feeding challenges, and any time a mother has worries or questions about breastfeeding beyond the scope of the provider's knowledge or allotted appointment time.

5. Dr. Duane said that it would be ideal if all mothers could meet with a lactation consultant after childbirth. How does your intended place of birth help parents to meet their breastfeeding goals? Is lactation support available 24/7? If you're not sure, you may consider discussing these questions in advance with your maternity care provider and the place of birth.

6. Is your intended birth place recognized as Baby-Friendly? **Take a look at the [10 Steps in the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative](#). Find the facilities in your area that are recognized as Baby-Friendly on the [locator on their website](#).**

7. Dr. McCue said, “It’s have a c-section, have a vaginal birth, go home, make yourself a sandwich, and teach yourself how to breastfeed while you’re at it.” What kind of follow-up services does your hospital or community provide to parents after discharge?

The importance of mother’s milk:

8. After birth, when would you expect a mother’s milk to “come in”, or begin to increase in volume? What are some common reasons that this transition can be delayed?

Read this helpful explanation of [how milk is produced](#) by the body during pregnancy and after birth, and about factors that can cause [delayed or low milk production](#).

9. What knowledge or experience do you have with pumping to express breastmilk?

Take some time to watch [Stanford University’s video on Maximizing Milk Production with Hands-on Pumping](#). There are additional links on the right side of the page that may be useful to learn about breastfeeding and medications, hand expressing, and how to know if a baby is getting enough milk.

10. How soon after birth do mothers need to begin pumping or hand expressing milk in order to begin building a sufficient milk supply if they are separated from their baby, or the baby is unable to nurse right away?

Within the first hour. Watch this excellent short video by Dr. Jane Morton at Stanford University on [early initiation of breastfeeding or milk expression](#).

11. Dr. Duane described being so engorged when her milk first came in after they arrived home with her first child, that she was unable to latch the baby, and they both ended up crying! Take some time to learn some simple strategies you can use to relieve engorgement, and help a baby latch and get milk when the breast is very full.

**Some useful resources for providers and parents:
ABM Clinical Protocol #20: [Engorgement](#)**

[Preventing and Minimizing Engorgement- www.kellymom.com](http://www.kellymom.com)
[Relieving and Treating Engorged Breasts](#) by Medela, Inc.

12. What do you know about how human milk can improve outcomes for premature infants? Dr. McCue discussed the role of milk banks in providing donor milk for hospitalized infants. Does your intended place of birth use donor milk for infants when mother's milk is not available?

For more information on formal and informal milk sharing (milk banks vs. direct parent-to-parent donations), read this article from [Breastfeeding USA](#). More information on this topic can be found at: [Eats on Feets](#), and [Human Milk 4 Human Babies](#)

Mother's Wisdom:

13. Sumitra told us that they were home with Levi for two full months before they were exclusively breastfeeding, without needing to pump or provide him with supplemental bottles of breastmilk. She went on to breastfeed him for a year. She said, "Even as hard as all of it was, it was so worth it. I'm so glad I went through all that, and I don't regret any of it." What does this tell you about the meaning of breastfeeding for some women? What does Sumitra's experience teach us about motherhood and perseverance?

14. Yev told us that her birthing process was much more natural than breastfeeding. Do you think breastfeeding comes naturally for most mothers and babies, or is it a learned skill?

15. Do you have past personal experience with breastfeeding another infant? What has been the experience of your family members or friends? Did it come naturally, or was there a steep learning curve? How and where do most parents in our society learn how to feed and care for a newborn?

16. Dr. Anderson described the first 4-6 weeks as the hardest when getting started with breastfeeding, and then it got easier. In fact, she felt that it was "one of the most rewarding things I've done in my whole life." What factors contributed to you, or mothers that you know, continuing to breastfeed despite facing challenges, or deciding not to continue?

17. The mothers featured in the film went on to successfully breastfeed their subsequent children. Yev even said it's "absolutely worth trying, and succeeding." Why do you think they had motivation to try again, after experiencing serious challenges with their previous child? What do you think they did differently with the next baby, to give themselves the best chance of success?

18. Yev said that it would have been helpful to have had an experienced support person just sit with her for a few days to show her how it's done. In many cultures, this is the norm- grandmothers, aunts, sisters, and friends stay with the new parents, care for the mother as she recovers from birth, prepare nourishing food, and teach them how to care for the baby. In the United States, this kind of built-in support is unusual. What type of hands-on support after childbirth is typical in your culture or family?

19. One of the mothers in the support group described how her mother came to stay with her after her daughter was born, taught her how to position the baby for feeding, and got up with her at night- but then her mother returned home and she was on her own. Another mother discussed the support she received from the nurses in the hospital after her baby was born, but was left with no help once she was discharged home. What does this tell you about the support available to most parents in the US?

20. Dr. Duane gave examples of how critical her husband's help was in getting through those first few nights at home with the baby and enabling her to breastfeed when they were struggling. Dr. Anderson said of her husband and baby, "We are breastfeeding this child." List some specific ways that the non-nursing parent can help the nursing mother meet her breastfeeding goals.

You'll find some suggestions here: [An Open Letter to Partners.](#)

21. Discuss the statement Sarah's mother told her about breastfeeding: "You have everything you need right here." What kinds of messages or advice have you received from family members about feeding your baby?

22. Think about Sarah's description of breastfeeding as "a wonderful relationship. It's not just feeding, it's nurturing and loving." Do you agree or disagree? Is breastfeeding just a way to feed a baby, or is it a relationship? What about as the child grows beyond the newborn stage?

23. Dr. McCue told a story about her neighbor sending over their nanny to help after she had her first baby, and recalled feeling embarrassed that someone thought she needed

help. She discussed how we value independence in our culture, but this isn't always what works for new mothers. Do you agree? Why or why not?

24. Throughout the film, mothers and babies of different ages are shown breastfeeding. In US culture, we don't often see breastfeeding in action, in public, or even in private spaces. What personal experience do you have of seeing mothers and babies breastfeeding?

25. Dr. Anderson said it takes a village to breastfeed, ideally set up during pregnancy. Take some time to research what lactation support is available in your area. Does your birth place offer outpatient lactation services or breastfeeding support groups? Are there community-based IBCLC's (International Board Certified Lactation Consultants) or breastfeeding support meetings?

You can search for IBCLC's (International Board Certified Lactation Consultants) available in your local area on the [ILCA](#) and [USLCA](#) "Find a Lactation Consultant" directories.

26. Sumitra and Dr. Duane mentioned [La Leche League](#), an international, volunteer-run organization which helps "mothers worldwide to breastfeed through mother-to-mother support, encouragement, information, and education." **Take a minute to peruse their website, and click the "get help" tab to search for local groups in your area. What did you find?**

27. In the absence of supportive family, defined cultural postpartum traditions, or support networks available for all new parents, what role do you see these types of groups fulfilling for parents learning how to feed and care for their babies largely on their own?