

Dear Sir/Madame,

I am an older first-time mother living in a remote area (Port Hedland) currently breastfeeding my 11 month old daughter. It has been a struggle, and I still cant say I enjoy it. I write to relate factors that helped or hindered our breastfeeding relationship and perhaps help others.

ANTE-NATAL

The ante-natal classes and literature emphasised the benefits of breastfeeding. My mother used formula for all of us, but my sister had tried breastfeeding (and had difficulty). I resolved to try.

HOSPITAL

Port Hedland tries to implement the baby friendly guidelines. My daughter roomed in. The midwives varied from supportive to fanatical. There was dissent between them when my daughter became dehydrated as my milk did not come "in". I had to give permission to use formula - a decision made on the 2nd request on the advice of 2 separate midwives. The next shift did not agree.

There was not enough breast-pumps or shields - we shared pumps and I had to wait for a "hard" shield that the midwives thought would be better for me. I would have been willing to buy my own. The midwives had to attend every feed as we were using a supply line to encourage her to attach. This meant some delays, or rather awkward tries while waiting for someone to become available.

I stayed 6 days in hospital, leaving with pills to help with supply.

I had a cracked nipple and was not sure about breastfeeding but willing "to give it a go". The baby friendly guidelines definitely had a positive influence on my decision at that point.

COMMUNITY NURSES

I developed post-natal depression in the weeks after giving birth. I was diagnosed by the community nurse and encouraged to join a support group. The support group was fantastic, but at that time I was the only one breastfeeding. The others had given up for one reason or another. Nevertheless, they complimented me on keeping going.

At this time I composed hate mail to the ABA while struggling with a colicky baby at 2 am in the morning. I also attended a couple of ABA meetings and became a member.

I never felt able to discuss my issues with either the nurse or the ABA counsellor. When I tried, both reinforced the need for good attachment and seemed to think I was OK. I should have pressed the matter, but by then I was barely coping. It took 6 months before it seemed we got the hang of it, and then she started biting and now "chews".

COMMUNITY

We are fortunate in having the Well Women's Centre which provides a nice clean place to feed near the shopping centre. In general, suitable places are hard to find.

I joined the WA Playgroup association and found a number of other mothers happily breastfeeding. It is becoming the norm.

At 11 months, my daughter was finally accepted into long day-care.

The centre has pre-breastfeeding posters on the walls, but as I find it hard to express more than 20 ml's, my daughter has water during the day. She will not touch either formula or cows-milk from a bottle or cup. This is reluctantly supported by the carers - I could not find any help with this at all.

My daughter does not want to be weaned.

SUMMARY

The pro-breastfeeding factors were:

- literature
- ante-natal classes
- baby friendly hospital
- support groups (ABA, playgroup, mothers groups)
- suitable, clean, comfortable locations
- my daughters preferences

The ante-breastfeeding factors were:

- family history
- my own milk supply
- my daughter (colic, teeth,...)
- post natal depression
- no-one to sit down and look at what I was doing and give advice
- unsuitable/unfriendly civic spaces

Regards,

Shoena Messner