

The SA/NT branch of the Australian Breastfeeding Association consists of 165 volunteers. 105 of these are breastfeeding counsellors that counsel and support new and expectant mothers as well as women having subsequent babies. Our branch operates its own 7-day Breastfeeding Helpline staffed by qualified, voluntary counsellors, enabling people to access breastfeeding support and information. Support groups ran by trained breastfeeding counsellors in metro and country areas of SA to give support and information to pregnant women, new mothers and mothers of older children. Breast pump hire for mothers that are either returning to work, have a premature baby or to assist with increasing supply. Breastfeeding Education Classes, Health Professional Seminars, hospital visits to new mothers, school visits, participation in hospital antenatal classes and Parent & Baby Expos are just some of the many tasks each volunteer takes on.

Research has shown that women who learn about breastfeeding before the birth of their baby are more likely to successfully breastfeed. Our local groups provide an ideal environment for pregnant mothers to learn about babies and breastfeeding, but mothers are often not told about them until after the birth of their baby.

There is also little breastfeeding information provided to mothers through the antenatal period. The emphasis is on the birth. Learning about breastfeeding in the postnatal period is not ideal and from the statistics not successful either. After the arrival of their newborn, women feel overwhelmed with emotion and sometimes find it difficult to know where to turn for help. Women feel isolated in their new role as a parent as they have lost the sense of security or stability in their life by taking time off work. Nearly all mothers of newborns are also socially isolated. This applies whether the mother is from a low socio-economic area (where services can be difficult to access), or a more affluent area where the mother may not have built up a local social network because her social contacts were mostly through her work. Women are also isolated from their families living cities apart and do not have any support at all.

Whilst breastfeeding initiation rates have improved to around 80%, this figure drops to less than 20% fully breastfeeding by 6 months of age. This drop usually occurs quite early, usually around the 2-4 week mark. This indicates a gap in services provided and support for these women upon returning home after giving birth. Many mothers call our Helpline in great confusion and distress as they struggle to cope in their new roles as parents, often not knowing that it is normal to be experiencing any of the difficulties or emotions they may be experiencing. Many others don't know where to seek help so turn to artificial milks at the encouragement of family members or friends.

In SA whilst our mothers are often sent home with a very young baby, all of these mothers are offered a visit from a Child & Youth Health Nurse and these are meant to occur within the first two weeks of a baby being born. In reality this is not occurring until the babies are six weeks old and often eight weeks old. This could be a fantastic way to support mothers and to work with mothers before they wean prematurely however by the time these visits occur many of these mothers have already weaned as they had no support and many view artificially feeding as 'just as good'.

Some mothers will call us during this time but many more don't and many of our counsellors report the same concerns regarding counselling enquiries from mothers

with babies under 1 week of age. With the early discharge from hospital the mothers return home with a 2-3 day old baby often when the mother's milk has not 'come in' yet. These mothers are often struggling with attachment issues especially when their milk does come in. What supports does this mother have during this time, not much unfortunately. They need to contact someone to seek help but many mothers don't have the confidence to do this and this is even for professional women. Many mothers feel they should know what to do, how to cope and view asking for help as weak on their behalf. They need to set up supports before they have their baby so they know and feel confident with who they are calling for support.

Society doesn't support breastfeeding as normal – it is not depicted in everyday life, television shows or media articles. When you do see breastfeeding shown on TV it is very quick or is usually only short term feeding especially on popular shows, or they only talk about the negatives, what has gone wrong and usually only in the first couple of months. How is society meant to know what is normal if it is not even depicted as normal on these shows.

The media sensationalises these situations by showing the extreme of any circumstance and this would turn anyone off regardless of what the topic is they were discussing. Recently 60 Minutes had a show about 'Attachment Parenting' that was very extreme, since this show our office and our helpline has had many callers saying that they want to feel ok about holding and responding to their baby but don't want to do attachment parenting. This has obviously given many new mothers a very bad opinion of attachment parenting. Why did the TV show do this? Because its not going to draw viewers in or comments if they showed normal attachment parenting, but in doing so they have pushed many others to hide that they are parenting this way. Why is it not normal to hold and respond to your baby? Why does society put these unreal expectations on our new mothers? Employers would not expect new employees to know what to do or to learn on their own so why do we do it to our new mothers? We would not put someone who can't drive a car in a car alone and say go for it, they would have someone to teach them and support them through and not only on the first lesson but many lessons until they are confident enough to go it alone, so why do we leave our new mothers alone for days, weeks to learn parenting and breastfeeding by themselves?

It is very important for a child's development for the parent to respond to a baby's needs quickly and confidently. Many mothers comment to us that they have been told not to pick up their baby if it cries, that it needs to learn that it sometimes has to wait. This often has been told to them by their family members but also by Health Professionals and mothers tend to believe the HP's as this is their job, they are supposed to know but often it is their personal experience and values impacting on these new mothers and not unbiased, well balanced research. Mothers need to be empowered to make their own decisions but often we have mothers ringing us saying I was told to wean..... I was told to let my baby cry to sleep.... I was told I had to introduce solids but my baby is only 8 weeks old..... These mothers don't want to do this but feel they have to. Babies aren't designed to wait – they cry because of a need, a need to be fed, changed or just held. Mothers shouldn't feel like this they should feel that it is ok to respond to their child.

Many of the morning shows also have parenting or baby issue talk times. We feel that this is a great way of getting breastfeeding information, any problems and also the support you can get out into the wider community but why do they continually have speakers on there that are telling new mothers misinformation regarding breastfeeding and sleep. Anyone can write a book and get published, go on the radio, TV or the web and put their point of view across especially companies with lots of money. This marketing is damaging the chances of future babies/children being breastfed in the future and having a healthy normal life.

There are several main issues mothers contact our helpline with. Firstly low supply – quite often this is perceived low supply as it is more about the mother not understanding or knowing what is normal feeding patterns of a newborn and if it is established that it is low supply our counsellors are well trained to give the mother information on how to increase their supply whilst not needing to use artificial baby milk. Secondly sleep – my baby doesn't sleep all night!! Society tells mothers that if your baby doesn't sleep all night you are a bad mother or your baby is bad. All babies have different needs in regard to feeding and sleeping and it is time that we supported the mothers with the truth and this needs to be shown in every day life and events. Many other myths go with the baby not sleeping such as giving them a bottle of formula or giving them solids early will help them sleep, this information is not based on any truth or fact and further supports the myths against breastfeeding. Another is attachment problems as we have previously discussed.

Artificial milks are also promoted albeit aimed at over 12 months old however what message is this sending to our community. Everyone agrees breastfeeding is best, even the artificial milk companies say this but then they also say that their product contains the same ingredients as breast milk. Often this is enough for mothers that are experiencing huge difficulties and pressure from family saying 'you tried now do what we did and artificially feed, it didn't harm you so it won't harm your baby'.

These new mothers aren't going to research what the long term impact on their baby will be or the truth behind the artificial company claims, why would they? They believe them, they see it on TV, in newspapers, in chemists, they hear it at the doctors, hospitals etc and they are tired, defeated. Breastfeeding wasn't working and they don't know who to talk to. Our society doesn't realize that many of today's health issues such as increased obesity, diabetes, heart disease and the many more on the increase can be linked to not being breastfed when they were baby's.

All expectant and new mothers need encouragement, confidence and moral support to enable them to be successful when breastfeeding their babies. To do this we need to change the attitude of society to view breastfeeding as normal and that whilst artificial milk has a place it is not normal and does not contain what breast milk contains and does not promote normal develop in our babies.

This needs to begin with educating society. Breastfeeding needs to be depicted everyday in a normal way, to be seen, to be talked about as normal not optimal. Secondly we need to assist the Health Professionals within Australia to receive more training with breastfeeding during their training and after; this also needs to include information for them about where to go to for further information or where to refer the mother to. The health care costs to the community if we met the recommendations

of the World Health Organisations would be significantly reduced and although some figures have been put forward of \$20 million or more for just six illnesses, I feel that it really is immeasurable as we will never know the reduced risks of all diseases that breastfeeding protects us and our babies from. Just imagine hospitals not straining with critically sick babies from diseases such as rotavirus, bronchitis, asthma, gastroenteritis, whooping cough and many others too numerous to mention now. How much funding and room would they free up for others within our community? With an aging society imagine when these babies are older – how many would have healthier lives requiring less medications, and hospitalisations.

The Australian Breastfeeding Association is striving to create an awareness in the community of the importance of human milk, breastfeeding and nurturing and of the need for community support for the nursing mother and her baby isn't it about time the government stopped playing lip service and provided this for our new mothers also?

To do this more funding for our national organisation and branches has to be made available. The government needs to provide stricter guidelines and rules for media companies, medical professionals and workplaces in regard to breastfeeding depiction and advertising of artificial milk companies and this includes the follow on toddler formulas.

Other agencies that deal with mothers should also be investigated on how their service and employees support new mothers, how their waiting lists can be reduced or how Australian Breastfeeding Association can support these organisations to provide better services.

To successfully breastfeed, mothers need: the correct information, a positive environment, support from family and friendships with other mothers. They also need to know where to go for up-to-date information and support. We feel it is imperative to support new mothers during this difficult and often isolating time. Helping more women to initiate and maintain breastfeeding, will increase the number of experienced mothers able to support other new mothers in the future. The community awareness of the importance of breastfeeding and human milk as the norm for human babies will also increase giving future new mothers and generations to come the community support they need. This will in turn give the new mothers the confidence and skills to enable them to succeed with their breastfeeding relationship and their quality of life will be enhanced and that of their children and families for generations to come.

Many women state to us "I wish I had known about you earlier and then I could've continued breastfeeding". This is a statement we hear often. Isn't it about time we changed this to "I'm so glad I knew about breastfeeding and the support services available before I had my baby"! We need the government to be proactive in supporting and promoting breastfeeding.

Thank you

Tracey Kelly
Administration Officer
On behalf of

SA/NT Branch Office
Australian Breastfeeding Association
34 The Parade
Norwood
SA 5067
Ph/Fax: (08) 8362 9662
santoffice@breastfeeding.asn.au