



**NATIONAL ABUSE FREE CONTACT  
CAMPAIGN**

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**NCSMC**

**National Council of Single Mothers and their Children Inc.**

220 Victoria Square *Tarndanyangga* Adelaide SA 5000 Ph: 0882262505 Fax: 0882262509

[ncsmc@ncsmc.org.au](mailto:ncsmc@ncsmc.org.au)

<http://www.ncsmc.org.au>

ABN: 78 844 531 318

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The Secretary

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Aging

Parliament House, Canberra

ACT 2600 Email: [haa.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:haa.reps@aph.gov.au)

Dear Secretary

Please find attached a joint submission from the National Abuse Free Contact Campaign (NAFCC) and National Council of Single Mothers and Their Children Inc (NCSMC) to the Inquiry into Breastfeeding.

NAFCC and NCSMC would be pleased to support this submission with oral evidence if requested.

Yours faithfully

Marie Hume  
National Abuse Free Contact Campaign

Dr Elspeth McInnes AM  
National Council of Single Mothers  
and Their Children Inc

NAFCC is a national (and international) feminist coalition of organisations who have formed to advocate on behalf of women and children going through the Family Court system with concerns about domestic violence and child abuse.

The National Council of Single Mothers and their Children Incorporated was formed in 1973 to advocate for the rights and interests of single mothers and their children to the benefit of all sole parent families, including single father families.

NCSMC formed to focus on single mothers' interests at a time when women who were pregnant outside marriage were expected to give up their children for adoption by couple families and there was no income support for parents raising children alone. Today most single mothers are women who have separated from a partner. Issues of income support, child support, paid work, housing, parenting, child-care, family law, violence and abuse continue as concerns to the present day.

NCSMC has member organisations in states and territories around Australia, many of which also provide services and support to families after parental separation.

NCSMC aims to:

- Ensure that all children have a fair start in life;
- Recognise single mother families as a viable and positive family unit;
- Promote understanding of single mothers and their children in the community that they may live free from prejudice;
- To work for improvements in the social, economic and legal status of single mothers and their children.

The National Abuse Free Contact Campaign and National Council of Single Mothers and Their Children recognise the importance of breastfeeding, for the emotional and physical well being of both mothers and children.

The Australian Breast Feeding Association has noted that breastfeeding is an important preventative health issue. They highlight that it is important in the prevention of chronic disease, including breast cancer and cardiovascular disease. They highlight that the risks of not breastfeeding include:

- reduced development of baby's eyesight;
- reduced cognitive development and;
- increased risk of gastrointestinal,
- increased risk of respiratory tract; and
- increased risk of middle ear infections.
- increases the risk of SIDS, asthma, allergies, obesity, diabetes melitis, inflammatory bowel disease and lymphomas.

They also highlight that premature weaning also increases the risk to women of breast cancer, ovarian cancer, hip fracture in later life and diabetes type 2.

The National Abuse Free Contact Campaign is a lobby group who advocate on behalf of women and children in relation to family law issues. National Council of Single Mothers and Their Children is the peak body for single mothers in Australia. We are two separate and distinct organisations but share many common concerns in regards to changes to family law commenced July 1 2006, and how this is impacting on breastfeeding behaviour of mothers and children.

The family law changes require shared care between parents after separation to be considered in decisions relating to children. Increasingly orders are being made by the Family Court for children to spend equal or substantial amounts of time with each of their parents, even when these children are very young. Little regard seems to be accorded children who are being breast fed by their mothers, and there appears to be little heed given to research which shows the health benefits to children and their mothers of sustained breastfeeding.

Family Law professionals are not required to, and often lack appropriate training in the area of infants' physical and emotional developmental needs in determining time spent

with each parent. The focus is on allocating the child between parents, rather than children's developmental needs. In this context, breastfeeding is argued by legal professionals to be a 'strategy' which is 'used' by mothers to limit or prevent fathers spending time with their children after separation. An increasingly common reported outcome in contested children's proceedings involving breastfed infants is the allocation of babies to a shared care arrangement between parents, which is incompatible with successful breastfeeding.

Breastfeeding is commonly misunderstood by lawyers and mediators to be a mechanical activity which can be stopped and started on cue and where milk can be extracted to send with the child to the other parent for days at a time. The assumption appears to be that women can express enough breast milk for the father to bottle feed the child i.e. that breast feeding is simply about the 'milk' as opposed to the nurture, care and connection between mother and child. It is important that decision makers in family law realize that breastfeeding is a symbiotic process, where mother and child connect with each other in order to continue a successful breastfeeding relationship i.e. it is not a cold giving of milk from one source to another but requires a warm and stress free relationship between mother and child. In order to produce milk, breast milk is replenished by the suckling of the child (or by the action of expressing) and it would be difficult for any woman to express enough milk "in advance" to cover a child's needs for 3-4 days. It must be recognised that breastfeeding is a potent emotional and biological interaction between mother and child.

NAFCC and NCSMC have been advised of cases where orders have been made that children as young as 7 months old be placed in shared care arrangements.

It is our understanding that until the introduction of artificial breastfeeding products, children throughout the world were commonly breastfed for two to three years (Lactation Resource Centre).

Our understanding is that there are many benefits of sustained breastfeeding. These include:

- Valuable nutritional and immunological benefits, which are maintained in the second year of breastfeeding.
- Enhanced cognitive development has been shown to be positively associated with duration of breastfeeding.

- There has found to be a relationship between the duration of breastfeeding and incidence of obesity and overweight. Longer breastfeeding duration was a significant protective factor,
- Breastfeeding promotes mother-child attachment and bonding which in turn may lead to a greater sense of security for the child. This is particularly important at times of stress including the stress of separation on children. The importance of attachment and bonding for children enhances their ability to create positive relationships with all significant others. Therefore breastfeeding actually enhances the child's relationship with both parents, not just the mother. Contrary to the frequently expressed view that breastfeeding is detrimental to the child's relationship with the father, the research overwhelmingly indicates that it significantly enhances this relationship.
- Domestic Violence – The ABS Personal Safety Survey identified that around one in four women has experienced domestic violence. Pregnancy and birth are times of heightened risk for the onset of violence and attacks on mothers and infants. Successful breastfeeding requires a peaceful, safe, supportive environment so mother and baby can focus on feeding. Living with domestic violence prevents and inhibits successful breastfeeding and exposes mothers and babies to extreme emotional stress and risks of physical injury. Consideration needs to be given to domestic violence within the family law arena and its effects on breastfeeding behaviour.

The Royal Australasian College of Physicians Pediatrics and Child Health Division outline the advantages of feeding the older baby and weaning slowly:

- The child is able to outgrow infancy at her own pace.
- The emotional security of being able to turn to mother's breast for comfort is of great importance to many toddlers. For these children, the trust they have developed in the mother's acceptance of their needs is part of their secure development.

Weaning, therefore, needs to take place at a pace that meets the child's needs. In our combined experience over many years, women are often instructed to wean the child immediately to allow contact with the father regardless of the child's development and emotional needs.

There are also important health benefits to mothers of sustained breastfeeding. These include

- lower risk of anaemia,
- longer periods of lactational amenorrhea,
- reduced risk of osteoporosis and breast cancer,
- promotion of postpartum weight loss and
- sense of personal achievement.

**The National Health and Medical Research Council in Australia (1995) Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents.** (1996) Infant Feeding Guidelines for Health Workers recommended exclusive breastfeeding for the first four to six months (new draft guidelines [submitted for public comment July 2001] state 'about six months') with breast milk still the most important part of the baby's diet for up to 12 months. Breastfeeding is then to continue into the second year. There is no set upper age limit to breastfeeding.

The position paper by the **Royal Australian College of General Practitioners** recommended exclusive breastfeeding for six months then gradual introduction of complementary foods. Breastfeeding should continue for as long as the mother and child wish. The RACGP position paper includes the UNICEF recommendation that breastfeeding should be sustained for at least two years after six months of exclusive breastfeeding.

**American Academy of Pediatrics 1997, Breastfeeding and the use of human milk. Pediatrics 100(6): 1035-1039.** The American Academy of Pediatrics recommended gradual introduction of solid foods in the second half of the first year. Breastfeeding should continue for at least 12 months and then for as long as mutually desired.

The World Health Organisation recommended 6 months of exclusive breastfeeding, then breastfeeding to two years and beyond in addition to appropriate complementary foods (WHA54.2 May 2001). WHO recommends sustained breastfeeding for two years and beyond.

The National Abuse Free Contact Campaign and NCSMC therefore recommend:

- Legislative changes to the Family Law Act which direct decision-makers to have regard to maintaining breast feeding for children in making determinations for arrangements for interim and final orders regarding children;

- Training for all family law professionals – judges; registrars; child and family consultants; child representatives and expert family assessors – into the health benefits for children and their mothers of sustained breast feeding.