Healthy Eating Advisory Service



Creating a breastfeeding friendly environment

Early childhood services

Background

This resource outlines steps to create a supportive breastfeeding environment in your centre.

You will learn how to:

- Develop a policy supporting breastfeeding
- Provide time, space and support for breastfeeding and expressing milk
- Create a culture that normalises and values breastfeeding

Creating a breastfeeding friendly centre strengthens family and centre relationships, promotes child and maternal health and contributes to a workplace culture of care and respect.

Why support breastfeeding?

Breastfeeding offers significant health benefits to children and mothers including:

- Providing all the nutrition that babies need during the first 6 months of life
- Offers health benefits to the baby. This includes building their immune system and provides health benefits to the mother
- Promoting child health and strengthens family trust and inclusive care.
- Aligns with current recommendations to support breastfeeding where possible for up to 12 months and beyond. These recommendations include:
  - Infant feeding guidelines
  - Get Up & Grow

Who needs support?

- Staff returning to work and wanting to continue breastfeeding
- Families of breastfeeding children that attend your centre.

Returning to work or using childcare is a common barrier to breastfeeding. Early childhood services can play a key role in supporting employees and families with returning to work and breastfeeding.

Understanding your legal obligations

Federal legislation

The Federal Sex Discrimination Act 1984 states that it is unlawful to discriminate against a person because they are breastfeeding. This includes:

- Refusing to allow a parent to breastfeed or express breastmilk during work hours
- Failing to provide a safe environment or appropriate break times
- Refusing a parent who wants to breastfeed or express breastmilk at the centre

These protections apply to all types of early childhood education and care services. This includes long day care, occasional care, family day care and in-home care.

National quality framework

You can help your centre meet the requirements of the National Quality Standard - Element 2.1.3. by:

- Creating procedures for the safe storage and heating of breast milk
- Providing a supportive environment for breastfeeding or expressing breastmilk.

How can your service be breastfeeding friendly?

To create a supportive environment, your service should:

- Develop a policy supporting breastfeeding that ensures workplace culture supports breastfeeding.
- Provide a clean, comfortable and private place for breastfeeding or expressing.
- Allow time and flexibility to accomodate breastfeeding or expressing breastmilk.
- Promote a positive, inclusive attitude towards breastfeeding.
- Educate staff to provide support and understanding of breastmilk management.

Breastfeeding friendly policy

Implement a clear policy that supports breastfeeding and ensures consistent support for both families and staff. It communicates your services commitment to breastfeeding. It should also outline practical supports and procedures in place.

This also aligns with Healthy Places Healthy Futures. Services should support breastfeeding by providing space, time and a supportive culture.

Steps to develop a policy supporting breastfeeding

1. Review current practices and policies

Assess how your service currently supports breastfeeding and identify gaps.

2. Engage key stakeholders

Consult with relevant key stakeholders which can include: families, staff and health professionals.

3. Draft the policy

You can use 'Developing a healthy eating policy' resource to write your policy.

When developing a healthy eating policy make sure to include the following considerations regarding breastfeeding under each subheading:

Healthy physical environment

- Provide suitable, private spaces for breastfeeding, expressing breastmilk and safely storing breastmilk
- Storage and handling procedures for breastmilk
- Compliance with food safety standards

Supportive culture

- Provide lactation breaks and flexible work options to support breastfeeding employees

Families and community partnerships

- Outline ways to support breastfeeding families and staff through communication, resources and community engagement

Be aware of relevant laws and entitlements, such as:

- Right to breastfeeding breaks at work
- Anti-discrimination legislation protecting breastfeeding mothers

Tip!

Display your policy and make it part of staff orientation and family enrolment packs.

4. Review and finalise

Share the draft with stakeholders for feedback. Review the policy and finalise.

5. Communicate the policy

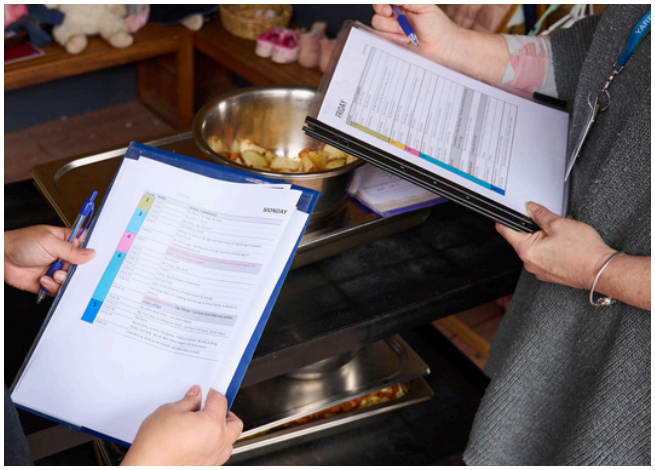
Publish your policy in relevant employee handbooks and other communication channels. You can hold an information session to discuss policy and practices with staff.

6. Ensure implementation appropriate support structures

Ensure you have set up appropriate spaces for breastfeeding or expressing.

7. Track and assess

Gather feedback from breastfeeding staff and parents. Track use of lactation space and breaks. Adjust as needed to improve effectiveness and work culture.



Creating a supportive environment

Facilities and environment

- Provide a clean, comfortable and private space for breastfeeding or expressing.
- Allow breastfeeding parents to visit and breastfeed during the day, if desired.

Handling expressed milk

Support expressed milk feeding by:

- Clearly labelling and storing breastmilk in a dedicated fridge.
- Following safe storage, thawing and warming procedures.

Lactation breaks

Offer flexible work options and lactation breaks for staff to breastfeed or express.

The number of lactation breaks needed will depend on the baby's needs and age.

For more guidance on lactation breaks, visit the Australian Breastfeeding Association.

Training and employee awareness

Train all staff in:

- The importance of breastfeeding and its role in infant development
- Safe handling and storage of expressed breastmilk
- Responsive feeding practices and recognising infant cues
- Respectful communication with breastfeeding families
- Cultural awareness in infant feeding practices

For practical management and safe handling of expressed breastmilk, see our resource here.

The Australian Breastfeeding Association has a pathway to become a Breastfeeding Friendly Early Childhood Education and Care Service. You can learn more here.

References

1. National Health and Medical Research Council (2012) Infant Feeding Guidelines. https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/health-advice/public-health/nutrition/infant-feeding-guidelines
2. Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth), https://www.legislation.gov.au/C2004A02868/latest/text
3. Australian Breastfeeding Association, https://www.breastfeeding.asn.au/

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