

Approaching a school

Background

The UK has **some of the lowest breastfeeding rates in the world, with 80% of families saying that breastfeeding ended before they wanted it to.**

The **leading experts in the field**, including UNICEF's The Baby Friendly Initiative and the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, believe that including breastfeeding within the school curriculum will have a positive impact on parents of the future. The **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child** (article 24) states that education about breastfeeding is the right of every child.

Research suggests **decisions about how babies will be fed are made long before pregnancy** and when young people feel comfortable with breastfeeding, this creates more confident parents and facilitates wider societal support for new families.

In **Scotland**, breastfeeding already forms part of the **Curriculum for Excellence** in Health and well-being while 'the role of breastfeeding in infancy' is specified in the Food and health curriculum.

In **England and Wales**, while the current curriculum does not specifically mention breastfeeding, there are many places where it has a natural home.

Throughout the Key Stages, the **science curriculum** in England and Wales looks at life cycles. From "notice that animals, including humans, have offspring which grow into adults" and "find out about and describe the basic needs of animals, including humans, for survival (water, food and air)" in Year 2 to "reproduction in humans (as an example of a mammal), including the structure and function of the male and female reproductive systems" in Key Stage 3.

The discussion of breastfeeding also sits neatly in the new '**Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education**' curriculum in England and Wales. The subject of breastfeeding touches on health and nutrition, family relationships, roles and responsibilities of parents and body changes in puberty.

Parental support

Evidence suggests that the general public and parents are strongly in support of breastfeeding being talked about in the classroom. These materials appreciate that breastfeeding isn't easy for all families and states: "Sensitivity is paramount. Of course, some pupils may know mothers who struggle to breastfeed or are unable to breastfeed for other reasons."

Opportunities

- The materials encourage a breastfeeding peer supporter and/or breastfeeding parent to visit and co-teach the sessions. They include template letters to parents. Peer supporters may be able to talk to parents or teachers in advance of the sessions.
- The sessions can be flexibility timed and the 'Mini-milks' section can be delivered in 10-20 minute periods.
- Sessions include speaking and listening, writing and science curriculum objectives.
- There are FAQs and notes sections providing background information because we acknowledge not all staff may feel confident in this area.

Practical tips for peer supporters who want to support a school with these materials:

- It is sometimes about finding ‘that one member of staff’. They may not necessarily have had personal experience of breastfeeding but they are open to discussion, understand the value of the sessions and are happy to be guided and supported. It may be that a local breastfeeding support group includes someone with a link to a specific school. Or you may find someone through a community Facebook group.
- You could also make an approach at a local authority level.
- The first person to approach may be the science coordinator, PSHE coordinator or headteacher depending on the size of the school but one passionate class teacher can get the ball rolling.
- Offer to talk to teachers to outline the materials. This might be a short presentation at a staff meeting, an INSET day or a conversation with a cluster of teachers.
- Offer to talk to parents. In Scotland, the Breastfeeding Network team had stalls in playgrounds and at nursery pick-up where they showed the materials and answered parent questions.

References:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4494694/>

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/07/31/every-child-should-taught-breastfeeding-school-end-stigma-childrens/>

<http://theconversation.com/does-breastfeeding-really-belong-on-the-school-curriculum-96740>