



International Childbirth Education Association

## Core Competencies- Basic Skills Expected for Lactation Care Providers

Maternal and Infant experts recognize the superiority of breastfeeding for optimum health of mothers and infants. The American Academy of Pediatrics and the World Health Organization recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life, continuing through the first year of life and ongoing as long as mutually agreed by mother and child.

The United States Breastfeeding Committee, in support of these recommendations, has developed a set of basic skills considered necessary for support of the breastfeeding family:

### **Knowledge** \_\_\_\_\_

#### ***All health professionals should understand the:***

- 1.1 basic anatomy and physiology of the breast
- 1.2 role of breastfeeding and human milk in maintaining health and preventing disease
- 1.3 importance of exclusive breastfeeding, and its correlation with optimal health outcomes
- 1.4 impact of pregnancy, birth, and other health care practices on breastfeeding outcomes
- 1.5 role of behavioral, cultural, social, and environmental factors in infant feeding decisions and practices
- 1.6 potentially adverse outcomes for infants and mothers who do not breastfeed
- 1.7 potential problems associated with the use of human milk substitutes
- 1.8 few evidence-based contraindications to breastfeeding
- 1.9 indications for referral to lactation services
- 1.10 resources available to assist mothers seeking breastfeeding and lactation information or services
- 1.11 effects of marketing of human milk substitutes on the decision to breastfeed and the duration of breastfeeding

### **Skills** \_\_\_\_\_

#### ***All health professionals should be able to:***

- 2.1 practice in a manner that protects, promotes, and supports breastfeeding
- 2.2 gather breastfeeding history information sufficient to identify mothers and families who would benefit from specific breastfeeding support services
- 2.3 seek assistance from and refer to appropriate lactation specialists
- 2.4 safeguard privacy and confidentiality
- 2.5 effectively use new information technologies to obtain current evidence-based information about breastfeeding and human lactation

## **Attitudes \_\_\_\_\_**

### **All health professionals should:**

- 3.1 value breastfeeding as an important health promotion and disease prevention strategy
- 3.2 recognize and respect philosophical, cultural, and ethical perspectives influencing the use and delivery of breastfeeding care and services
- 3.3 respect the confidential nature of the provision of breastfeeding care and services
- 3.4 recognize the importance of delivering breastfeeding care and services that are free of commercial conflict of interest or personal bias
- 3.5 understand the importance of tailoring information and services to the family's culture, knowledge, and language level
- 3.6 seek coordination and collaboration with interdisciplinary teams of health professionals
- 3.7 recognize the limitations of their own lactation knowledge and breastfeeding expertise
- 3.8 recognize when personal values and biases may affect or interfere with breastfeeding care and services provided to families
- 3.9 encourage workplace support for breastfeeding
- 3.10 support breastfeeding colleagues
- 3.11 support family-centered policies at federal, state, and local levels

All health professionals do not need to have the level of competence expected of those practitioners who care for childbearing women, infants, and young children. Health professionals who care for childbearing women, infants, and young children can be further divided into two groups:

1. Those that provide **primary care** are front-line practitioners who care for women of childbearing age and/or infants and young children.
2. Those that provide **secondary care** may be front-line practitioners or practitioners with enhanced knowledge and skills specifically referable to the use of human milk and breastfeeding.

### **Those health professionals who provide primary and secondary care for childbearing women, infants, and young children should be able to:**

- 4.1 understand the evidence-based *Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding*
- 4.2 obtain an appropriate breastfeeding history
- 4.3 provide mothers with evidence-based breastfeeding information
- 4.4 use effective counseling skills
- 4.5 offer strategies to address problems and concerns in order to maintain breastfeeding
- 4.6 know how and when to integrate technology and equipment to support breastfeeding
- 4.7 collaborate and/or refer for complex breastfeeding situations
- 4.8 provide and encourage use of culturally appropriate education materials
- 4.9 share evidence-based knowledge and clinical skills with other health professionals<sup>35</sup>
- 4.10 preserve breastfeeding under adverse conditions

### **In addition, those health professionals who provide secondary or more direct "hands-on" care for childbearing women, infants, and young children should also be able to:**

- 5.1 assist in early initiation of breastfeeding
- 5.2 assess the lactating breast
- 5.3 perform an infant feeding observation
- 5.4 recognize normal and abnormal infant feeding patterns
- 5.5 develop and appropriately communicate a breastfeeding care plan

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