



# HPH/BFHI Breastfeeding Supportive Workplace Initiative For Healthcare Facilities



## *AWARD CRITERIA*

The Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) is a global project of the World Health Organisation and UNICEF which recognises that implementing best practice in the health service is crucial to the success of programmes to promote breastfeeding.

The Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative can be viewed as a quality initiative implementing research based best practices. The successful implementation of the Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding in the maternity unit and the Breastfeeding Supportive Children's Unit project, ensures that the health facility supports and promotes informed parental choice. This health promoting initiative is linked with the objectives of the Health Promoting Hospitals Network (HPH), the designating authority for the BFHI in Ireland.

It can be difficult for health workers to promote and support clients to breastfeed if they themselves are not supported to continue breastfeeding when they return to work, thus the Breastfeeding Supportive Workplace Initiative. This initiative is open to any health service workplace – a general hospital, a specialist hospital, a care facility, or a whole health region. Health promotion is for staff too, not just for clients.

# Breastfeeding - best for mother, best for baby...

## AND best for employers

*Breastfeeding is important for the health and well-being of both mothers and children. Perhaps less well known is that employers also stand to benefit when mothers on their staff breastfeed.*

### **Breastfeeding is good for employers because it:**

- ▶ **Reduces absenteeism** - Parental absenteeism increases as infant illness rates increase, and breastfed infants have less illness. Reduced absenteeism leads to increased productivity in the workplace, particularly so where absenteeism can interrupt team workflow.
- ▶ **Increases productivity and staff commitment** - Employees are likely to show increased commitment to their job, as well as increased productivity. This is because less time will be spent worrying about a sick infant at home and they feel valued as a mother by the employer.
- ▶ **Leads to lower staff turnover** - Women who are supported to continue breastfeeding are more likely to return to work after maternity leave, saving the employer the costs of recruiting and training a new employee – costs which can be substantial.
- ▶ **Creates a positive corporate image** - Employer is viewed as 'progressive' and 'family friendly'. This has many benefits including the ease at which future employees can be recruited. It can also lead to high morale within the workforce, and positive relations between employers and employees. Supporting breastfeeding is a low cost intervention that supports a family friendly work culture.

Cohen, R. Mrtek M, Mrtek R. **Comparison of maternal absenteeism and infant illness rates among breastfeeding and formula feeding women in two corporations.** *Am J Health Promot*; 10(2):148-53, 1995

Katcher A and Lanese MG. **Breastfeeding by employed mothers – a reasonable accommodation in the workplace.** *Pediatrics* 75(4), 644-647, 1987.

Jones EG, Matheny RJ. **Relationship between infant feeding and exclusion rate from child care because of illness.** *J Am Diet Assn* 93(7): 809-811, 1993

Fogarty J. **Infectious disease risk in crèche, day-care and pre-school.** *Ir Med J* 89(6), 210-211, 1996

**Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (pregnant employees etc) Regulations**, SI 44/1993 and SI 218/2000.

[www.healthpromotion.ie/breastfeeding](http://www.healthpromotion.ie/breastfeeding) The legislation and leaflet/poster on returning to work and breastfeeding



## Are you a Breastfeeding Supportive Workplace?



The Maternity Protection (Protection of Mothers who are Breastfeeding) Regulations (Statutory Instrument SI No. 654) came into effect in October 2004. Participating in the Breastfeeding Supportive Workplace Project helps a workplace to meet the requirement of this legislation.

# HPH/BFHI Breastfeeding Supportive Workplace Initiative

*A Breastfeeding Supportive Workplace is one which recognises the value of mothers on the staff continuing to breastfeed. This recognition is shown by the support of management and work colleagues to facilitate time and space for breastfeeding. Workplaces may be at different stages in supporting breastfeeding, so different awards are available to recognise this support.*

## **Bronze Award**

Review your current practices within the organisation. If all the Bronze items are fully in place, you develop an Action Plan to address at least one outstanding area in the next year and obtain management commitment to put this plan into action; you will be eligible to receive a Bronze Award. Return a copy of the Self-Appraisal, the Action Plan and the award application.

## **Silver Award**

Review your current practices within the organisation. If all the Silver items are fully in place in addition to the Bronze items, you develop an Action Plan to address at least one outstanding area in the next year and obtain management commitment to put this plan into action; you will be eligible to receive a Silver Award. Return a copy of the Self-Appraisal, the Action Plan and the award application.

## **Gold Award**

Review your current practices within the organisation. If all the Gold items are fully in place in addition to the Bronze and Silver items, you will be eligible to receive a Gold Award. Return a copy of the Self-Appraisal and the award application. Outline how you will audit that practices remain supportive.

## **Steps to a Mother Friendly Workplace**

1. Have a written policy addressing the supports for pregnant and for breastfeeding staff in the workplace.
2. Provide information to all managerial, supervisory, personnel staff and for co-workers on the implementation of this policy.
3. Inform employees who are pregnant or considering pregnancy of their maternity benefits, the importance of breastfeeding and the breastfeeding supports in the facility.
4. Provide comfortable private and safe facilities for expressing and storing breast-milk and/or a place to feed the baby.
5. Keep the work environment clean and safe from hazards to pregnant and breastfeeding women.
6. Provide paid breastfeeding breaks or a reduction in working hours with cover provided for the women's work while she is on break.
7. Offer flexible work hours/work site to pregnant and breastfeeding women.

*At all award levels, the health facility must nominate a focal person for the initiative, return an annual evaluation and an annual Action Plan for improving supportive practices.*

*Designation is reassessed every two years. HPH/BFHI may at any time, ask the health facility to provide evidence of their practices and may seek further information, e.g. by talking to staff or visiting the health facility.*

# How can employers support breastfeeding?

In order for breastfeeding to continue after return to work, a woman needs to breastfeed her baby, or to have time allocated and access to comfortable facilities where she can express and store her milk when away from her baby. Employers can facilitate breastfeeding through providing time, space, support and information.

## Time

- ▶ Offer mothers flexible work options and/or job-sharing for a temporary period of time or on a more permanent basis.
- ▶ Provide paid lactation breaks so that the mother can breastfeed her baby or express milk. A discussion of the mother's needs would be held with their supervisor before returning from maternity leaves so that cover can be arranged during breaks, if needed.

## Space

- ▶ Provide a place for expressing milk that is convenient to the work area. It should include a clean, private safe area with comfortable seating, a power point, facilities for washing hands and equipment, and safely accessible at all times.
- ▶ Provide facilities and information regarding the safe storage of expressed breastmilk. Some organisations provide a full size electric pump for staff mothers' use as this can speed up pumping time.
- ▶ Providing a space where the baby can be with the mother at breaks is also supportive.

## Support

- ▶ A breastfeeding policy statement, which outlines commitment to support breastfeeding amongst staff shows support.
- ▶ Educating all employees about the importance of breastfeeding helps them to support their work colleagues who are breastfeeding.

## Information

- ▶ Increase employee awareness with regard to maternity benefits, and of policies in operation in the health facility such as the specific breastfeeding/lactation break provisions in their workplace and/or how to get this or further information if needed.
- ▶ Provide specific information about the importance of breastfeeding and the value of continued breastfeeding on return to work, to all staff going on maternity leave.

For more information and to return your documentation, contact:

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