

# Rockland Child Care News

Child Care Resources of Rockland, Inc.

September—December 2015

## Why It Takes a Village to ~~Raise~~ Breastfeed a Child, and Why that Village Begins with YOU

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Beginning in elementary school, we learn that humans are mammals and that mammals, by definition, nurse their young. I grew up with the notion that if humans are designed to breastfeed by nature, the ability to breastfeed must come naturally and instinctively to humans upon birth—just like it does with the rest of our mammalian friends. I then went through college surrounded by messages of how breastfeeding is the natural way to feed our babies, reinforcing my perception that breastfeeding came, well, naturally! Then I found out I would soon become a mother myself. The decision to “nurse my young” was obvious. The possibility of running into difficulties with my natural mammalian instincts had never once crossed my mind. After all, women have been breastfeeding successfully since the beginning of time. Just put a baby on a breast, and voila! Easy-peasy, right? But then I gave birth, and my baby was whisked away to the NICU shortly after his first breath. Our separation set the stage for a slew of breastfeeding complications that still haunt me nearly a decade later. What I went through life believing to be a natural, instinctive, so-easy-a-cavewoman-could-do-it process became the most difficult struggle I would ever go through physically, mentally, and emotionally. I was unable to breastfeed my own baby, and I felt nothing short of a failure because of it. I was a failure as a mother. I was a failure as a nutritionist. Heck, I was even a failure as a mammal!

### The Challenge of Breastfeeding Today

As I and countless other mothers discovered, the ability to start and continue breastfeeding does not come so naturally after all. The World Health Organization explains,

*“While breastfeeding is a natural act, it is also a learned behavior. An extensive body of research has demonstrated that mothers and other caregivers require active support for establishing and sustaining appropriate breastfeeding practices.”*

Why is something that was once a natural part of motherhood all of a sudden so complicated? A variety of obstacles in our current society contribute to this growing phenomenon. Current medical and healthcare practices, labor standards and workplace policies, socio-cultural norms and stigmas, and media-propagated myths and misconceptions are just some examples. Combined together, the need for breastfeeding support becomes even more imperative.

The story is in the numbers. New York mothers initiate breastfeeding with an impressive 80.5% of all newborns. The number drops to 37.1% of infants exclusively breastfed at three months, and then by almost another half to 17% at 6 months. So what is it that separates the 17% who do succeed from the rest? It is not a matter of luck or privilege or being “better mothers.” It is simply a matter of having that active support necessary to overcome the many barriers they will undoubtedly face.

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### Why Is Breastfeeding Such a Big Deal?

Breastfeeding plays a critical role in child growth, development, and survival, preventing the most common causes of infant illness and mortality, including a 36% reduction in the risk of SIDS. Breastfeeding helps protect against a wide range of acute illnesses, such as diarrhea, malnutrition, ear infections, and respiratory illnesses, as well as lifelong chronic diseases, such as obesity, asthma, food allergies, and diabetes. Breast milk provides all the nutrients an infant needs for the first six months of life. The composition of breast milk changes based on a baby's gestational age, time of day, and even within a feeding to meet the baby's ever-changing nutritional needs. Breastmilk taste also changes from one feeding to the next based on the mother's diet. Exposure to a variety of tastes early on decreases the likelihood of picky eating later in life. The antibodies in breast milk also continually change, custom-tailored to protect against the germs in the baby's specific environment. Thanks to breastmilk's composition and the bonding and skin-to-skin contact that come along with it, breastfeeding improves not only physical outcomes, but also academic, behavioral, social, and emotional outcomes—both in infancy and over the child's lifetime.

But the benefits don't end with infants. Breastfeeding helps mothers lose weight and protects against obesity, diabetes, osteoporosis, and several types of cancers. Breastfeeding hormones help improve mood, promote bonding, prevent post-partum depression, and even combat sleep deprivation. According to *The Business Case for Breastfeeding*, breastfeeding families also benefit financially, saving an average of \$3,000-\$4,000 per year.

But wait, there's more!

Child care providers also benefit greatly from breastfeeding babies in their programs. Breastfed babies are healthier and less likely to infect other children in the child care environment. This is important considering how easily germs spread in the child care environment. Being in child care has been found to double the odds of needing antibiotics by 1.5 years. However, when exclusively breastfed for at least four months, there is a protective effect that lasts 2.5 years. Healthier babies are also easier to care for. Breastfed babies have less boogers, less spit-up, less stinky stools, and less constipation, colic, and fussiness. For child care providers on the CACFP program, NY State provides reimbursement for each breastmilk feeding offered, meaning that providers actually *make* money from providing breastmilk to infants.

### An Opportunity for Child Care Programs

With breastfeeding being such a key predictor of child health and development outcomes, who better to champion its cause than the very people who care for children as a profession? The odds are stacked ever so highly against breastfeeding success, but with every challenge comes opportunity. The child care community holds ENORMOUS power when it comes to providing breastfeeding families the active support they need to succeed. It is interesting to note that the biggest drops we see in breastfeeding rates after initiation tie in directly with when mothers return to work and place infants in child care. This means that child care providers are uniquely positioned to reverse a huge chunk of the breastfeeding obstacles mothers commonly face.

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It is estimated that 57% of mothers with infants are working mothers who will need to utilize child care for their babies. Sixty-one percent of infants and children are in a child care setting, where they spend an average of 32 hours each week. Considering all the feedings that take place with all those infants during all those hours, it is clear why child care programs are so uniquely positioned to influence the future of breastfeeding. When the mother cannot be present, it is in the hands of the child care provider to make the necessary arrangements to properly store, prepare, and feed expressed breast milk to the baby. When the mother can be present (such as at drop-off, pick-up, and work breaks), it is in the hands of the child care provider to allow for and support direct breastfeeding, an important practice associated with greater breastfeeding success.

In addition to the time spent with children, child care providers have regular face-to-face contact with families, offering plenty of opportunities for breastfeeding education, support, and advocacy (even before pregnancy when breastfeeding education should ideally begin). They can also provide mothers with the resources and confidence to ensure a supportive breastfeeding work environment that will allow mothers to continue breastfeeding. *The Business Case for Breastfeeding* resource, for example, can empower mothers with the knowledge that breastfeeding friendly practices are in the employer's best interest as well, generating a \$3 return for every \$1 invested.

By proactively supporting mothers throughout their breastfeeding journeys, child care providers play a huge role in allowing breastfeeding to continue upon returning to work. All in all, the efforts of child care programs to support breastfeeding go a long way. A major CDC/FDA study in 2012 found that **child care programs' support of breastfeeding mothers tripled the likelihood of breastfeeding at six months!**

### Show Your Support & Become “Breastfeeding Friendly”

Breastfeeding Friendly Child Care initiatives encourage child care programs to support breastfeeding families. Programs that achieve certain standards of breastfeeding support are recognized with Breastfeeding Friendly certificates and the honor of being designated as “Breastfeeding Friendly.” It has never been easier to join the movement. Rockland County child care programs can now pursue the designation both from the county and the state. While the requirements are similar for both, each initiative has its own unique benefits. For example, NY Breastfeeding Friendly programs are featured in a publicly searchable database and interactive map on the NY State Department of Health website. The state also now offers a free 30-minute online Breastfeeding Friendly training which providers can use to satisfy training requirements. Rockland County Breastfeeding Friendly programs will have the benefit of free on-site support by a lactation consultant. Laurie Messinger, BS, CWWS, IBCLC, is the county's Breastfeeding Promotion and Support Program Coordinator. In addition to direct support to providers, she offers free lactation education and support services to a center's breastfeeding clients and employees.

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The Breastfeeding Friendly designation shows families that a program is committed to quality child care and is a great way to attract new business while providing that lifeline of support breastfeeding mothers so desperately need. To get started, visit [childcarerockland.org/breastfeedingfriendly](http://childcarerockland.org/breastfeedingfriendly).

### Moms & Babies Need Our Help

After 119 long days after birth (yes, I counted!), my baby latched on directly on his first try for the very first time, without the pain, tears, and hours of agony and frustration we had grown accustomed to at every feeding prior. One hundred nineteen days is how long it took me to find the support I needed to overcome the obstacles in my breastfeeding path. While my early breastfeeding experience was the hardest thing I've ever gone through, it was also my biggest accomplishment. My baby was born prematurely, and my milk is what gave him a fighting chance. Thanks to the support of family, friends, lactation professionals, mother support groups, employers, and of course, the child care community, I was able to continue breastfeeding for two years. There is no way we would have made it on our own.

It really does take a village to successfully breastfeed a child. Breastfeeding can and should come naturally, but not without the right support. Moms need our help now more than ever. The burden to succeed at breastfeeding against so many odds should not be placed on mothers alone. Everyone benefits from a breastfed child and the responsibility to ensure a breastfeeding child's success is a job for everyone. Let us unite as a community and show breastfeeding mothers they have our support. Let us stop perpetuating the false hope of "You can do it!" and instead tell breastfeeding mothers what they really need to hear: "We can do it—together."



As of August 2015, Rockland Worksite Day Care holds the distinction of being the first and only NY Breastfeeding Friendly Child Care Program in Rockland County. While a separate designated breastfeeding room is not required to be Breastfeeding Friendly, it is recommended as the ideal standard for supporting breastfeeding mothers. Rockland Day Care embraced this standard and repurposed an old office into a cozy breastfeeding space mothers may use to privately breastfeed or express breast milk. The breastfeeding room (left) has kept busy since its creation, with four mothers expecting to use it this fall. Mothers are also welcomed and encouraged to directly breastfeed their babies at the center before and after work and even during lunchtime visits. Director Maria Ceci finds that the environment not only promotes physical health, but also a sense of bonding that brings children and parents closer together. Supporting breastfeeding mothers "makes it overall better for the whole family" she says, "and what's good for the family is good for the child."