

# COVID-19 & Breastfeeding Webinar Series

## Webinar 2: Connecting with Participants During Unsettling Times

### Webinar Goal

- The COVID-19 & Breastfeeding webinar series aimed to enhance and strengthen Healthy Start grantees' capacity to adapt their breastfeeding support in order to meet their client's needs via virtual platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The second webinar aimed to strengthen virtual interactions between Healthy Start staff and participants, including virtual lactation support.
- The webinar series was hosted by the Healthy Start TA & Support Center in partnership with Cathy Carothers, BLA, IBCLC, FILCA, Co-founder and Co-Director of Every Mother, Inc.



### Connecting During COVID

Building authentic connections with participants and communities is an essential part of Healthy Start. Connection is especially important to cultivate during uncertain times, but can be challenging when in-person interactions are limited or aren't at all possible. Below is guidance for connecting in-person and virtually during COVID.

#### Safety Considerations for In-person Interactions

Follow the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's \(CDC\) guidance](#) around protecting yourself and others from COVID:

- Get vaccinated and stay up-to-date on your COVID vaccines, if you are eligible.
- Wear a well-fitting mask indoors in public areas of substantial community transmission.
- When indoors in public, stay six feet away from others if you are not up-to-date on your COVID vaccines.
- Wash your hands often with warm water and soap, for at least 20 seconds.
- Monitor your daily health and watch for fever, cough, shortness of breath, or other symptoms of COVID.

#### Guidance for Virtual Breastfeeding Education

- When possible, use your video so you can see the participant, easily, do demonstrations, and feel more connected.
- Invite participants to keep certain items on hand to support their learning (e.g., dolls, other teaching tools).
- When facilitating a group virtually, use tools to make your sessions more interactive (e.g., breakout rooms, polls, the "chat" feature).
- Refer participants to virtual support groups (e.g., Baby Café USA, Postpartum Support International) and virtual community opportunities (e.g., WIC, faith community)
- Encourage participants to use mobile apps, such as Pacify, to find local lactation support.

#### Tips for Improving Interactions While Wearing a Mask

- Find a quiet place to minimize distractions
- Maintain eye contact and smile with your eyes
- Use gestures to add meaning to your words
- Be mindful of your speech volume and check in to ensure they understand what you are saying
- Practice in front of a mirror





## Tools for Building Connections

When counseling participants about breastfeeding, it is important to prioritize building an authentic rapport before sharing information or strategies. Below are three key steps you can take to authentically engage with participants throughout your interaction.

### Step One:

- Ask open-ended questions to help the discussion flow naturally, such as:
  - *“Tell me what you’ve heard about breastfeeding.”*
  - *“What concerns do you have about breastfeeding during the pandemic?”*
  - *“What does your partner say about breastfeeding?”*
- Be curious:
  - Listen and learn about the participant’s experience before jumping in with your thoughts or solutions.
- Seek to understand:
  - Summarize what you’ve heard and ask if you are understanding them correctly.

### Step Two:

- Build a rapport and affirm their feelings:
  - Acknowledge their challenges:
    - *“You’re right, breastfeeding can be pretty overwhelming at first!”*
  - Find something they are doing right:
    - *“Look at you! You should be proud.”*
  - Read between the lines:
    - *“It sounds like you are really exhausted.”*
  - Appeal to what motivates them
    - *“I can tell what a great mom you are since you’re concerned about this.”*

### Step Three:

- Meet the participant where they are.
- Practice shared decision-making:
  - Work towards finding a solution together and remember that while you have expertise in breastfeeding, the participant is the expert of their life.
- Remember the three ways to educate and try to use them whenever possible:
  1. **TELL THEM WHAT TO DO** (good)
    - Tell them how to position the baby for a good latch
  2. **SHOW THEM WHAT TO DO** (better)
    - Demonstrate how to position the baby using a doll
  3. **ENGAGE THEM IN WHAT TO DO** (best!)
    - Have them practice positioning the baby using a doll





## Strengthening Listening & Observation Skills

Each interaction with participants is an opportunity to learn about their thoughts, feelings, motivators, and needs. Practicing careful listening can help you fully absorb what participants are sharing. Remember, listening entails more than just listening to someone's words. Body language accounts for 55% of messages given and tone of voice accounts for 38%, while words account for only 7%!

Some common temptations that can interfere with authentic listening include:

- Doing all the talking
- Projecting authority
- Using persuasion
- Jumping in with solutions too quickly

Try to implement the following key listening and observation skills:

- Pay attention to what is unsaid
  - *What is their body language and tone of voice like?*
- Be mindful of your own body language
  - *Am I facing the participant and maintaining eye contact?*
- Keep an open mind
  - *Am I letting my own judgments get in the way of fully listening?*
- Focus on building connections
  - *Have I developed a rapport before getting into content of the discussion?*

## Engaging Family Members

Fathers and partners are extremely important to the decision-making process around breastfeeding. In fact, one study found that 98.1% of women breastfed when their partner was supportive, compared to only 26.9% who breastfed when their partner was not supportive. Additionally, grandparents – especially grandmothers – can have a significant influence on women's breastfeeding decisions. To engage fathers, partners, and grandparents in the breastfeeding process, share practical suggestions for how they can help. Examples include:

- Bottle feeding the baby expressed milk
- Cooking or cleaning so the mother can breastfeed or express milk
- Finding other ways to bond with the baby, such as skin-to-skin

Remember to ask every participant you serve about their support system, as each family will have unique needs, desires, and goals.

## References

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2022. Risk for COVID-19 Infection, Hospitalization, and Death By Race/Ethnicity. [online] Available at: <<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/investigations-discovery/hospitalization-death-by-race-ethnicity.html>>
2. World Health Organization. 2020. Frequently Asked Questions: Breastfeeding and COVID-19 For Health Care Workers. 1st ed. [ebook] Geneva, Switzerland. Available at: <[https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/maternal-health/faqs-breastfeeding-and-covid-19\\_805d4ce8-2329-4227-9261-695afa68b32c.pdf?sfvrsn=d839e6c0\\_5](https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/maternal-health/faqs-breastfeeding-and-covid-19_805d4ce8-2329-4227-9261-695afa68b32c.pdf?sfvrsn=d839e6c0_5)>
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4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2021. Interim Guidance on Breastfeeding and Breast Milk Feeds in the Context of COVID-19. [online] Available at: <<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/care-for-breastfeeding-women.html>>
5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2022. Breastfeeding and Caring for Newborns if You Have COVID-19. [online] Available at: <<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/pregnancy-breastfeeding.html>>