

## Breastfeeding and Placements



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**Despite breastfeeding<sup>1</sup> being a subject that affects all parents, supporting students who are breastfeeding whilst seeking a placement or when on placement is an under-explored area, and one that placement practitioners may need to consider.**

**A student support need may arise if the age of a breastfed baby exceeds a student's maternity leave period or if a student gives birth mid-course or returns to studies shortly after birth.**

### **Support for a breastfeeding student parent on placement can include:**

- Facilities for pumping or hand expressing milk and storing<sup>2</sup>
- Option to bring baby to placement premises for breastfeeding
- Option for breastfeeding parent to visit baby at on-site childcare facility to breastfeed
- Facilities for baby to be fed expressed (or alternative age appropriate) milk during working hours

### **Legislation protecting breastfeeding at work**

In the majority of cases, especially during paid placements, students have the same legal rights and HSE (Health and Safety Executive) protections as any employee, meaning employers must consider the work environment (e.g. hazardous substances) and rest facilities. There is no legal right to paid breastfeeding breaks in the UK, which may be an unexpected change for some European students. As ceasing breastfeeding suddenly or earlier than intended can cause physical (e.g. engorgement and mastitis) and emotional issues for a breastfeeding mother, a lack of support can be viewed as a lack of consideration of rights.

### **Maternity action advises:**

Employers are obliged under the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 to provide "suitable facilities" for a breastfeeding employee to "rest". The Approved Code of Practice states that these facilities should be conveniently situated in relation to sanitary facilities and, where necessary, include the facility to lie down. These "rest facilities" are very likely to also be a suitable place for breastfeeding or expressing. Although private, the ladies' toilet is never a suitable place in which to breastfeed a baby or collect milk.

The Health and Safety Executive and guidance from the European Commission recommend that employers should provide:

- Access to a private room where women can breastfeed or express breast milk;
- Use of secure, clean refrigerators for storing expressed breast milk while at work
- Facilities for washing, sterilising and storing receptacles.





### **Inclusive practice and the diversity of student breastfeeding support needs**

Breastfeeding parents come from a diversity of family backgrounds. It is important to encourage students to discuss their personal requirements with placement practitioners and employers, who should be aware that:

- Re/lactation (producing breastmilk having not given birth or having given birth a long time ago) is a possibility for both trans and adopting parents. Therefore many LGBTQ+ families breastfeed their children whether or not they are the gestational or biological parent
- It is important not to make assumptions about disabled students' breastfeeding preferences or ability and where relevant, placement professionals can refer students to Institutional disability service colleagues for further support
- A student's religious and/or cultural background may also affect their breastfeeding experiences. For example, cultural traditions and decisions around religious fasting whilst breastfeeding

### **Student support needs at the end of breastfeeding**

Students may need additional support at the end of breastfeeding when feelings of low-mood and depression (often referred to as Post Weaning Depression) can occur. It may help to refer students to your Institutional mental health support team for further advice.

### **Where can I signpost students for further support?**

- [National Breastfeeding Helpline](#)
- The [Breastfeeding Network](#)
- The [Association of Breastfeeding Mothers](#)
- [La Leche League International](#)

<sup>1</sup> All types and styles of breastfeeding is implied, including, but not limited to; combi-feeding, mixed-feeding, pumping/expressing feeding, chest-feeding and nursing.

<sup>2</sup> Both ABM Breastfeeding Information Library and NHS Start4Life provide additional advice on expressing and storing breast milk.

