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Community Conversation Guide: How Can Our Community Support the Breastfeeding Experience in Brookings Businesses

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COMMUNITY CONVERSATION GUIDE



November 1, 2014

How can our community support the breastfeeding experience in Brookings businesses?

This forum is an opportunity for our community to come together and consider breastfeeding and support for our mothers and children with fresh eyes, fresh ideas, and a fresh conversation. Our conversation today will consider different approaches for increasing breastfeeding support in local businesses.

This guide introduces the issue, explains concerns with the breastfeeding experience in Brookings businesses, and presents three approaches to improving support. These approaches are not the only possible responses to the issue. Instead, they represent different ways that our community can take action based on our priorities.

Community Conversation Guide

HOW CAN OUR COMMUNITY SUPPORT THE BREASTFEEDING EXPERIENCE IN BROOKINGS BUSINESSES?

ISSUE SNAPSHOT

Supporting breastfeeding in Brookings businesses affects almost everyone in Brookings. Employers, family members, consumers, coworkers, and many other groups are all affected by the level of support breastfeeding mothers receive from Brookings businesses.

In 2012, the American Academy of Pediatrics² affirmed, “breastfeeding and the use of human milk confer unique nutritional and non-nutritional benefits to the infant and the mother, and in turn, optimize infant, child, and adult health as well as child growth and development.” They, along with the World Health Organization,³ recommend “exclusive breastfeeding for about 6 months,” with continued breastfeeding and complimentary foods through the first year.

In 2013, 77.7% of South Dakota mothers initiated breastfeeding, but only 45.6% of mothers were still breastfeeding at 6 months and only 15.9% of mothers were exclusively breastfeeding at 6 months.⁴ Women who begin breastfeeding may find it challenging to continue for a variety of reasons, including struggles to balance breastfeeding and work demands, lack of support from friends and/or family, social stigma, and few public places with access to nursing rooms.

Businesses play an important role in supporting breastfeeding mothers. The new Affordable Care Act requires that companies with 50 or more employees provide breastfeeding employees a reasonable break time to pump breast milk for 1 year and a private place to pump.

Breastfeeding Resources

- [6 International Board Certified Lactation Consultants \(IBCLCs\)](#)
- [Breastfeeding class at the hospital](#)
- [Weekly breastfeeding support group](#)
- [Supportive healthcare professionals](#)

and some businesses have already made strides towards supporting breastfeeding mothers. However, mothers and employers in our community identified a few aspects that need attention and improvement.

Business Benefits¹

Businesses who support breastfeeding experience:

- Cost savings of \$3 per \$1 invested in breastfeeding support
- Reduced absenteeism to care for ill children
- Lower health care costs (~ \$400 per baby over first year)
- Higher employee morale & loyalty
- Improved ability to attract & retain valuable employees
- Family-friendly image in the community

Breastfeeding in Brookings

In preparing for this deliberation, researchers from the Brookings Supports Breastfeeding team held focus groups with breastfeeding mothers and business leaders, and distributed a community survey, to learn more about the experiences of breastfeeding in our community. Based on what people said in the focus groups and on the survey, support for breastfeeding in Brookings seems to be growing,

ASPECTS OF THE PROBLEM

Lack of proper environment to pump at work or breastfeed in public

In many cases, women must pump in unsanitary spaces like bathrooms or in non-private spaces like conference or meeting rooms. To pump most successfully and efficiently (minimizing time away from work), the pumping space must be comfortable, clean, and private with resources such as a sink and refrigerator. Additionally, customers reported struggles in finding spaces to breastfeed in Brookings businesses.

“I pumped in a dungeon...It was leaky and damp, and every time I literally ran by with my bag and my coat because it was freezing down there.”

-Brookings Mother

Non-supportive breastfeeding culture in Brookings businesses

In the workplace, women experienced difficulty discussing breastfeeding support due to generational differences, gender dynamics, and coworker hostility regarding breastfeeding. Women felt support was passive, rather than proactive. Around town, many female customers did not feel comfortable breastfeeding in Brookings businesses.

“They are only accommodating if the employees really push for it.”

-Brookings Mother

Lack of formal awareness, education, and policies among employers

“We don’t really have official policies and that’s always frustrated me as a breastfeeding mom.”

-Brookings Business Leader & Mother

Some employers are unfamiliar with the process of pumping breast milk and the requirements for supporting breastfeeding employees. In some workplaces, decision-makers often did not have the information or experience

they needed to follow best practices in breastfeeding support. In many cases, policies for breastfeeding support are not written or formalized. Informal support lets employers address breastfeeding employees’ needs on a case-by-case basis, but without formal support, employees may not be aware of their rights or their workplace’s support for breastfeeding. Finally, many businesses had not even considered support for breastfeeding customers.

Discomfort talking about breastfeeding

Employees and managers often feel uncomfortable talking about breastfeeding or pumping, even when supportive policies are in place. Pumping breast milk is a private activity, and for many, breastfeeding is as well. The privacy issue contributes to a lack of comfort when talking about breastfeeding in the workplace.

“My supervisor directly was completely fine with whatever I was doing. But the second I’d say ‘pumping,’ he’d be like, and ‘That’s enough. I get it. You’re fine. I trust you.’”

-Brookings Mother

Difficulty juggling demands of work and breastfeeding

“I was feeling very guilty about taking that break [to pump]... I wasn’t having enough time at my desk, and there was pressure with that. How can I get everything done?”

-Brookings Mother

Pumping milk often requires several 20-30 minute sessions during an 8-hour workday. Pumping milk also requires coordinating pumping schedules with co-workers, storing milk during the day, and communicating pumping needs to coworkers and managers. Breastfeeding employees sometimes reported feeling guilty for pumping during work (even though it was during breaks).

APPROACHES TO THE PROBLEM

Approach 1: Prioritize Education

Our community should prioritize education about the needs of breastfeeding mothers and the benefits of supporting breastfeeding in local businesses. We should educate not just mothers or parents, but also family members, community members, and business leaders. This approach prioritizes the development and spread of local informational resources unique to our community.

Arguments for the Approach

- The American Association of Pediatricians now recommends exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months, but this is a recent change. Not everyone has experience with breastfeeding, and so education would help individuals better understand breastfeeding benefits.
- In focus groups, some individuals explained that friends and family, human resources, and/or management did not have knowledge about supporting breastfeeding and the needs of mothers in the workplace.
- Information about best practices for combining breastfeeding and work would help mothers overcome challenges like finding time to pump at work.
- Breastfeeding mothers would be better supported inside and outside the workplace by expanding educational opportunities beyond just parents to grandparents, friends, coworkers, and business owners.

Possible Actions

- Enhance breastfeeding education classes for mothers by bringing in current breastfeeding mothers to share their experiences.
- Offer additional educational opportunities for men, grandparents, and business leaders.
- Provide continuing education classes on breastfeeding to childcare centers, health care professionals, and local businesses.
- Develop a Brookings Supports Breastfeeding YouTube channel with video resources, including videos on breastfeeding benefits and best practices, information on how to create an inviting space for mothers, and parents giving their perspectives.
- Create a community speakers series about breastfeeding.

Potential Concerns

- For education to benefit Brookings, community members will have to devote time to attending classes, watching videos, and/or developing resources.
- Some community members might not see the advantage of learning more about breastfeeding, especially if they feel this issue is hard to relate to or talk about publicly.
- Classes and speakers require resources and coordination, and this will require leadership from a person or organization.
- While best practices may help some, breastfeeding can have individualized preferences and aspects for each mother, family, and business setting.

Approach 2: Develop Business Resources

Community support for breastfeeding should be developed through the creation of resources within and for Brookings businesses, for business leaders and breastfeeding employees.

Arguments for the Approach

- We already have businesses in Brookings that have policies and spaces for breastfeeding women in place. We could highlight and replicate those models in other local businesses.
- The recent Affordable Care Act requires businesses to provide pumping time/space for breastfeeding women returning to work. Some businesses have to make these changes, and better resources would help.
- Some resources would be low-cost. For example, local women who have combined breastfeeding and work are eager to serve as breastfeeding mentors to other new working mothers.
- Businesses that provide time and space for breastfeeding/pumping would likely attract and retain better, more satisfied employees.

Possible Actions

- Produce a formal mentoring network for breastfeeding employees.
- Create and distribute a resource packet for breastfeeding mothers highlighting how to combine breastfeeding and work.
- Develop resources for business leaders using local examples of successful Brookings businesses that provide breastfeeding support.
- Cultivate comfortable spaces for pumping at businesses – locking door, providing curtains, etc.
- Make and publically post formal written breastfeeding policies at the workplace.

Potential Concerns

- This issue may not be seen as important to all businesses, especially if a business does not see itself as having employees who would breastfeed/pump.
- Some steps involve creating new company policies for breastfeeding and businesses. There may be questions about who would develop those policies.
- Few, if any, formal incentives exist to prioritize developing and sharing resources.
- Area businesses might feel slighted if they are not selected as the example for other businesses to follow in developing policy, space, time, and so on.



Approach 3: Create a Supportive Culture

We should do more to create a supportive culture for breastfeeding in our community. Sometimes mothers find it challenging to talk about breastfeeding, breastfeed in local businesses, or find support groups. This approach prioritizes proactive support for breastfeeding mothers in Brookings on a larger scale.

Arguments for the Approach

- Supporting breastfeeding means supporting healthier families and babies in our community, which would likely attract and retain talented, prospective employees to Brookings.
- A culture that supports women breastfeeding wherever they choose may make it easier for women to continue breastfeeding.
- This approach prioritizes networking and our culture, and would not cost as much as other efforts.
- A supportive culture for breastfeeding mothers and families would allow us to promote Brookings as a positive place to live.

Possible Actions

- Increase the visibility and accessibility of breastfeeding support groups.
- Create spaces for public conversations about breastfeeding.
- Develop a “breastfeeding-friendly” program for businesses that includes clear signage or window decals for businesses that have a space for breastfeeding customers.
- Make a smartphone app for breastfeeding customers that identifies businesses and buildings that have spaces available for breastfeeding.
- Opt to use the word “breastfeeding” instead of euphemisms (“mommy break”) to create awareness and decrease stigma.

Potential Concerns

- Some people are uncomfortable with breastfeeding in public places.
- Changing the culture can be a challenge. While supporting breastfeeding is important, these actions may alienate women and families that use formula.
- Leadership is needed for support groups and administering the “breastfeeding-friendly” program.
- Public conversations take time and energy to organize.

One law, a single business, or even a broad policy will not solve these aspects of the problem. Instead, our community must consider the problem and prioritize approaches to solving it.

To make Brookings a breastfeeding supportive city, we need everyone in our community to get involved, including: families, businesses, community members, health care professionals, nonprofits, churches, government, and more.

Resources used in preparing this guide:

1. United States Breastfeeding Committee. 2002. *Workplace breastfeeding support (2002 Issue Paper)*. <http://www.usbreastfeeding.org/Employment/WorkplaceSupport/tabid/105/Default.aspx>
2. American Academy of Pediatrics. 2012. *Executive summary: Breastfeeding and the use of human milk*. <http://www2.aap.org/breastfeeding/files/pdf/Breastfeeding2012ExecSum.pdf>
3. World Health Organization. 2014. *Health topics: Breastfeeding*. <http://www.who.int/topics/breastfeeding/en/>
4. National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2014. *Breastfeeding report card: United States 2014*. <http://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/data/reportcard.htm>

For more about legal requirements for breastfeeding women in the workplace, see the Department of Labor’s website “Break Time for Nursing Mothers,” <http://www.dol.gov/whd/nursingmothers/>.

This guide was prepared by the Brookings Supports Breastfeeding team:

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