

The Future of Prenatal Breastfeeding Education

Kelly M. Durbin, IBCLC

1

A little more about me....

- I'm a mother of two.
- I'm from Cincinnati, Ohio.
- Late career change to IBCLC.
- I'm a part-time real estate flipper.
- I've been an LLL leader since 2008.
- I've lived all over the USA.
- I was 100% formula-fed 1971-72.
- I used to teach 4th grade.

I'm a life-long learner!

I'm studying German!



2

Conflict of Interest Statement

I do not have any financial interests or commercial conflicts related to the subject matter of this presentation, and I do not sell or promote any specific products.

3

What we will cover today:

- Why focus on prenatal breastfeeding education?
- Current state of breastfeeding education
- What the research reveals about PBFE
- Beyond the basics – what can we add for maximum impact?
- Survey results - insights from 107 lactation educators
- Innovations for the future



4

Have you heard the one about what the local LCs said to the breastfeeding coalition?

“You can’t teach prenatal breastfeeding education here!”



5

Why focus on prenatal breastfeeding education?

Potential outcomes include.....

- Builds foundational breastfeeding knowledge before baby arrives
- **Increases breastfeeding initiation rates** (Kehinde et al., 2023)
- Prepares parents to handle early breastfeeding challenges (Oggero et al., 2024)
- Reduces reliance on formula feeding
- **Boosts parent confidence in breastfeeding abilities** (Oggero et al., 2024)
- Improves chances of breastfeeding exclusivity
- **Improves handling of common issues** (Oggero et al., 2024)
- Decreases breastfeeding drop-off rates
- Provides realistic expectations about breastfeeding
- Helps partners/families support the breastfeeding parent
- Teaches proper positioning and latch techniques
- Educates about normal infant feeding behavior



6

Why focus on prenatal breastfeeding education?

- Promotes long-term health benefits for baby (e.g., immunity, gut health)
- Helps families navigate hospital/birth interventions that affect breastfeeding
- Informs about common breastfeeding myths
- Decreases chances of breastfeeding-related pain and engorgement (Huda et al., 2022)
- Encourages informed decisions about feeding methods
- Familiarizes parents with lactation support resources
- Provides awareness of breastfeeding laws and workplace rights
- Fosters community connections with other parents
- Empowers parents with problem-solving skills
- Reduces health care costs by increasing breastfeeding (Shin, 2010; Rollins et al., 2016)



7

How many people in the US take perinatal education courses?

2,884 women aged 18–35 years

No classes	Childbirth ed	Breastfeeding ed	Infant care
20.9%	69.1%	41.2%	34.4%



Lots of room for improvement!

Vanderlaan & Kjerulff, 2022

8

How/where are lactation educators teaching?

Variety of formats

In-person (private)	68%
In-person (hospital)	25%
Zoom, live formats	48%
Prerecorded video	15%

Some teach via more than one format.

(Informal survey of 107 LEs.)



9

Recent trends in BF education

- Families prefer a single-session format (Vanderlaan & Kjerulff, 2022).
- People are more likely to choose shorter classes (informal survey).
- Parents look for online education opportunities (Kindred, 2026).
- Social media is popular in the prenatal breastfeeding education space (Jones et al., 2022).



10

What are the most popular topics in prenatal breastfeeding education?

- Benefits of breastfeeding
- Principles of milk production/lactation
- Breastfeeding techniques (latch & positioning)
- Breastfeeding problems and solutions
- Pumping and milk storage
- Hunger cues
- On-demand feeding

(Kehinde et al., 2023)



11



Survey of 107 lactation educators reveals

Most popular topics

• Effective latching	97%
• Signs of effective feeding	97%
• Feeding cues	96%
• Feeding positions	93%
• Common challenges	93%
• Principles of milk production	90%
• Feeding patterns	88%
• Signs of poor feeding	86%
• On-demand feeding	80%

12

Survey of 107 lactation educators reveals

Less popular topics

• Pumping and milk storage	76%
• Benefits (maternal and infant)	68%
• Nighttime nursing	57%
• Going back to work	47%
• Handling criticism	27%

“There isn’t much time left for other topics!”

Comment from a survey respondent.



13

What does the research reveal?

- There is **no consensus** on the one *best* format (Wouk et al., 2017).
- **In-person is more effective** than virtual learning (Punduk-Yilmaz et al., 2024).
- Gaming apps may have low engagement (Grassley et al., 2017).
- Prenatal education is most effective when offered in **combination with postpartum follow-up** (Oggero et al., 2024).
- Virtual learning has increased in popularity, but **there are few studies to evaluate its effectiveness** (Marcuz et al., 2023).



14

Strengths of the WIC breastfeeding education and support model

- WIC evidence-based peer-to-peer BF education & support
 - Officially launched in 2004
- Peer counselors from the community
- BF peer counselors share a similar cultural context
- Often recruiting former or current WIC participants
- Offering support
 - In-person
 - Phone
 - Video call
 - Text
 - Home visits

Providing prenatal education and follow-up postpartum support



WIC Fact Sheet, 2019

15



First-time parents **don't know what they don't know.**

Current challenges in prenatal breastfeeding education

- Many parents view BF prep as optional.
- Course formats are too short.
- Sometimes material is contradictory or outdated.
- Some may use unrealistic teaching tools and idealized scenarios.

16

How can we make changes to improve prenatal breastfeeding education?



17



Who
What
When
Where
Why
How

18

Who are our allied health care professionals?

- Midwives
- OBs
- Pediatricians
- Family doctors
- Dieticians
- Acupuncturists
- Birth doulas
- Childbirth educators
- Health Ed teachers
- Health coaches
- Postpartum doulas
- Prenatal yoga instructors
- Infant massage therapists
- OT/PT who work with infants
- Mental health counselors



Let's team up!

19



Who are our targeted clients?

- Moms & couples
- Primary support person
- Grandmothers
- Fathers & partners
- Second-time moms - refresher
- Teen parents
- Couples inducing lactation
- Doulas & postpartum doulas
- Childbirth educators

20

What can we add to PBFE for maximum impact?

- Partner's role (Ummah et al., 2023)
- Nighttime nursing & sleeping strategies
- Infant microbiome
- Skill-based techniques
- More hands-on
- In-person demos with live BF dyads
- More confidence-building and less focus on the numb
- Skin-to-skin
- Baby wearing
- Hand expression
- Harvesting colostrum
- Pumping and over-pumping
- Risks of formula feeding
- Risks of birth interventions
- How to recognize predatory formula marketing
- Reading the infant - not the infant tracking app



21

- Partner's role (Ummah et al., 2023)
- Nighttime nursing & sleeping strategies
- Infant microbiome
- Skill-based techniques
- More hands-on
- In-person demos with live BF dyads
- More confidence-building and less focus on the numb
- Skin-to-skin
- Baby wearing
- Hand expression
- Harvesting colostrum
- Pumping and over-pumping
- Risks of formula feeding
- Risks of birth interventions
- How to recognize predatory marketing
- Reading the infant - not the app



These are all skill-based!

22

Why do we need skill-based breastfeeding classes?

When people lack infant feeding skills, they lean into product and gadget-based solutions.

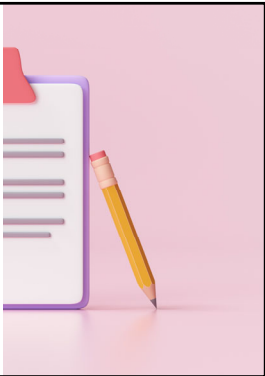
No calming skills?	Start with a pacifier.
No hand expression skills?	Start with a silicone or electric pump.
No skills for resolving pain?	Start nipple shield.
No skills for recognizing feeding cues?	Start with an infant tracking app.

From the research:
"Why do mothers use nipple shields..." (Kronborg et al., 2017)
This article indicates that nipple shields are frequently utilized as a shortcut for "inexperienced or insecure mothers" struggling with early breastfeeding challenges, such as suboptimal latch.

23

The Prenatal Breastfeeding Education Checklist

Disclaimer!
"I don't have the time to teach you everything you will need to learn about breastfeeding. Please continue learning about all the topics on your checklist."



24

How can we teach breastfeeding education?

Become a content creator on social media

- Develop bite-sized micro learning opportunities
- Instagram, TikTok

Deliver instruction on teaching platforms

- YouTube, Teachable
- Thinkific...

Help people discover books again.

- Host a book group – library or online

Vary your programs – short, med, longer

We still need traditional classroom education!



25

Beyond the basics: What can we change for maximum effect?

- Classes are standard prenatal care
- Multiple sessions
- Covered by insurance
- More hands-on
- Development of a BF plan
- Combined with postpartum support
- More consistent messaging
- Includes resources for mental health
- **Teach breastfeeding as part of the middle school and high school curriculum**
- More PSA in the community: billboards and bus stops

Lactation Educator's Wish List



26

Where do we teach?

- OB offices
- Midwifery offices
- Birth centers
- Pediatric offices
- Grocery stores
- Community centers
- Schools
- Yoga studios
- Coffee shops
- Libraries
- Food pantries
- Childcare centers
- Milk banks
- Your home or office
- Wellness centers
- Health fairs
- Farmer's markets



27

Innovation:

What is the pathway forward for prenatal breastfeeding education?



28

Innovations for prenatal breastfeeding education

- Offering whole family classes (Ummah et al., 2023)
 - Fathers/partners
 - Grandmothers
- Teaching PRE prenatal BF education (Reyes et al., 2019)
 - Teaching the non-pregnant population
 - Included in high school health education class
 - Increases BF knowledge, positive attitude, and intention
- Virtual reality (Ummuhan et al., 2024)
 - Higher scores on assessment of BF self-efficacy and LATCH
- BF education should be embedded in prenatal care
 - ACOG Committee Opinion #756 (ACOG, 2018)
 - ABM protocol #19 (Jack et al., 2024)
 - US Preventive Services Task Force (2016)



29



Could virtual reality become incorporated into prenatal breastfeeding education?

Ertas et al., 2026 studied 52 women, 26 with VR and 26 with standard education. VR was administered at 36 & 38 weeks.

VR was associated with higher prenatal breastfeeding self-efficacy and improved postpartum breastfeeding motivation.

30

Which state is leading the way with mandated breastfeeding education in the public school curriculum?

Human milk contains antibodies.
How do antibodies help newborns?

31

Innovation:
Teach breastfeeding in public schools

Arkansas

Surprised?

Arkansas passed Act 723 on April 12, 2023, which mandates that all public school districts and open-enrollment charter schools include breastfeeding information in health classes. The law officially took effect on August 1, 2023.

Breastfeeding education awareness campaigns →

Durham Public Schools, NC
Illinois, Minnesota, Vermont

32

Micro opportunities for breastfeeding education

- Billboards
- Transit stops
- Clinic offices
- Waiting rooms
- Window stickers
- T-shirts
- Free offerings
- Social media

What's your big idea? I'd love to hear it! Let's improve PSAs.

33

PSAs are everywhere!

"Only you can prevent forest fires!"

- Launched in 1944
- Longest-running PSA in American history
- Most effective and iconic PSA in US history
- Smokey Bear is one of the most recognizable figures in American culture (2nd only to Santa Claus)
- 1952 Smokey Bear Act
- The real Smokey had his own zip code.
- What about a breastfeeding PSA?

34

What about a campaign to protect human milk or promote milk banks?

(This image is fake.)

35

What if prenatal breastfeeding education was a continuum of learning instead of a single 60-minute class in the third trimester?

36

Old school versus the new model
breastfeeding education

Old school

- Hospital-based
- Lecture style
- In-person
- Limited to the classroom
- 60- 90 minutes
- Taken in the third trimester

New model of BF education

- **Multiple** course formats & sizes
- Podcasts, social media
- Continuum of learning
- Embedded in prenatal care
- Niche classes on special topics
- Skill-based learning
- Micro education opportunities, PSAs

37

Develop your plan for
teaching prenatal
breastfeeding
education

Who, where, and what do you want to teach?

Target audience (parents, extended families, partners)

Choose online or in-person

Select topics (regular or niche)

Consider community partners

Can you imagine....

- Starting a podcast, appearing on other podcasts
- Creating content for microlearning
- Bringing virtual reality learning to your hospital

Caution with WHO Code



38

Thank you!

Connect with me here:

- **LinkedIn**
- **Instagram – @breastfeeding wellness**
- **protectingyourpotential.com**
- **kellydurbin@outlook.com**



39