Suggested Responses to Breastfeeding Concerns

Lack of Confidence

*Here are some common reasons a woman may lack confidence about breastfeeding:*

A woman may be afraid that she won't be able to make enough milk, especially if she has relatives or friends who tell her about their milk "drying up."

- A can of formula has all the ingredients and nutritional value posted right on the can. There are no such reassuring labels on breasts.

- A bottle of formula decreases in volume as the baby is fed. You cannot see how much, if any, breast milk a baby is getting from a breast.

*Here are some ways to acknowledge a woman's lack of confidence and reassure her that if she wants to breastfeed, she can:*

- Many women are afraid that they won't be able to make enough milk. They may give their babies formula along with breastfeeding because they think he or she isn't getting enough to eat. But you will be able to make plenty of milk if you put the baby to the breast every time he or she is hungry. Nursing frequently is how you keep your milk from drying up.

- Women have been breastfeeding for centuries. In fact, the human race would not have survived if women couldn't produce the perfect food for their babies.

- If appropriate, consider sharing your own feelings when you were pregnant.

*Finally, remember that it will probably take more than one session with a woman to build her confidence in herself and her ability to breastfeed.*

Embarrassment

*Here are some common reasons a woman may be embarrassed about breastfeeding:*

- The media is full of images and references to women's breasts as sexual objects. (Gather some advertisements or book covers to show patients.) In fact, caressing of women's breasts often is part of the sex act. It may be the major "purpose" served by the woman's breasts so far in life.
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- In American society, female breasts are covered beginning at a very early age. Girls are taught that breasts are a very private body part, not to be seen by the public.

- Many educational materials contain pictures of women breastfeeding their babies with breasts fully exposed.

Here are some ways to acknowledge a woman's concerns about modesty and reassure her that if she wants to breastfeed, she can:

- You are not alone: Almost all women in the United States are used to thinking about their breasts as sex objects. But most women who start breastfeeding soon find that their view of their breasts has changed and they no longer feel awkward.

There are lots of ways to cover up when you breastfeed so that other people around you are comfortable, too. Unfortunately, in our country, we don't see many women breastfeeding in public. When we do, we usually notice just the women who are willing to show their breasts while they nurse, and we don't even notice women who breastfeed discreetly. Here are some ways to cover up when you breastfeed (explain how two-piece clothing helps, how the mother can drape a blanket over her shoulder, etc.).

- You can always find a private place to go to nurse your baby (your car, a women's lounge, a department store dressing room). If you wish, you could offer your baby a bottle in places where you would be embarrassed to nurse.

- If appropriate, consider sharing your own experience in overcoming this barrier.

Loss of Freedom

Here are some common reasons a woman may fear a loss of freedom with breastfeeding:

- People very often say to first-time expectant women, "Having a baby will change your life forever" or "Your life will never be the same." The expectant mother may fear breastfeeding as a part of this change.

- Many mothers want to or have to work, or they may be going back to school. They see this as incompatible with breastfeeding. Many educational materials feature pictures of breastfeeding women in nightgowns, obviously at home.
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Here are some ways to acknowledge a woman’s concerns about loss of freedom and reassure her that if she wants to breastfeed, she can:

- Lots of women are afraid that breastfeeding a baby could tie them down. But what most women do not know is that breastfed babies aren’t any more dependent on their mothers than bottle-fed babies. If you decide to breastfeed, you will still be able to go to work, school, and see your friends.

- It’s normal to be concerned about how to fit a new baby into a busy schedule. But breastfeeding doesn’t have to tie you down any more than bottle feeding does. You can put your own milk in bottles for use when you are gone, use formula supplements, or start out breastfeeding and then switch to formula. Even a few weeks or months of breastfeeding can make a big difference in your baby’s development.

Remember that the time you will spend breastfeeding is a short period in your life and your baby’s. Before long, your baby will grow up and be quite independent.

- It’s nice to have a special job that no one else can do for your baby. Your breastfed baby will have absolutely no uncertainty about who his or her mother is.

Lifestyle Restrictions

Here is a common reason a woman may fear that breastfeeding will restrict her lifestyle:

- Health professionals and educational materials often vigorously encourage women to have good diets and other health habits during breastfeeding.

Here are some ways to acknowledge a woman’s concerns about lifestyle restrictions and reassure her that if she wants to breastfeed, she can:

- Lots of women, like you, want to be sure that they give their baby the very best, and worry about eating or drinking the wrong things. Eating a good diet will help you feel better, and that is important. But you don’t have to eat perfectly to make nutritious breastmilk. If you eat when you are hungry and drink when you are thirsty, your milk will be fine.

- There are no foods that you need to avoid when breastfeeding. Think about women in Mexico or India: They eat spicy foods and still breastfeed.

Women who are tense or “hyper” can breastfeed just fine. In fact, the hormones your body makes help you relax and feel calm.
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- If you need to take prescription drugs, your doctor can usually find a type of medicine that you can take that will not interfere with breastfeeding.

Influence of Family and Friends

Here are some common examples of the influence of family and friends on breastfeeding:

- Family and friends play a major support role in mothers' lives. They may be the people who have agreed to provide child care. Persons of low economic status in particular tend to get most of their information from family and friends rather than books, newspapers, or magazines.

  Family and friends may have had no experience or perhaps a bad experience with breastfeeding.

- A woman not married to her baby's father may be looking for ways to help the father bond with the baby and form a "real family."

  Here are some ways to acknowledge a woman's concerns about the influence of family and friends and reassure her that if she wants to breastfeed, she can:

    - You will probably find that your friends will want to share their stories about breastfeeding, both good and bad. And you may get unnerving questions like, "Are you sure the baby's getting enough to eat?" There are many women in this area who are successfully breastfeeding their babies. Any of these women (provide short list with phone numbers) would be happy to talk with you about it.

    - It's great that your family cares so much. And because they care, they will want what is best for your baby just like you do. I would like to invite the baby's grandmother and/or father to clinic for classes (or counseling) on breastfeeding. (Expose them to other grandmothers and fathers who have positive points of view.)

    - Many fathers are really proud of their baby's mother for providing their baby with the best.

    - There are lots of ways to care for babies besides feeding. The baby's father or grandmother could be the one who bathes the baby or puts him or her to bed for the night.

    - If appropriate, consider sharing your own experience about breastfeeding and how you handled the advice you received.