

## Encouraging mothers to choose breastfeeding The antenatal period

FACTSHEET  
**02**

### What you can do

- Allocate a few minutes to discuss breastfeeding during antenatal consultations.
- Elicit mother's prior knowledge of breastfeeding.
- Uncover false beliefs and fears if present.
- Offer small amounts of information relevant to the individual mother.

Mothers who are encouraged to discuss their reasons for choosing a particular feeding method are less likely to be unhappy with their decision in the future or feel that it was ill-informed.

Because we live in a formula feeding culture, choosing breastfeeding involves a significant change in thinking and behaviour for many women and families. Consider using **motivational interviewing techniques** to initiate change. This is an approach designed to help people build commitment and reach a decision to change.

Motivational interviewing is not based on argumentative persuasion but involves listening to, acknowledging and practising acceptance of a broad range of the patient's concerns, opinions, preferences, beliefs, emotions, styles and motivations. You act as the vehicle which facilitates change in others.

### How to motivate

1. Ask open-ended questions such as 'have you thought about breastfeeding?'; 'What has been your experience of it so far?'; 'What would your partner/mother think if you were to breastfeed?'
2. Provide small amounts of relevant information which addresses the concerns of this individual mother, such as 'some babies have difficulty latching on but we can ...'
3. Reinforce past positive experiences. 'It was great that you did breastfeed for a few days last time

- even one breastfeed provides benefits for baby.'
- 4. Express concern for previous negative experiences. 'I'm sorry it didn't work out last time. Perhaps we can avoid similar problems in the future if we look at what happened then.'
- 5. Link breastfeeding to the process of pregnancy and childbirth. 'In hospital you may be encouraged to put the baby to your breast to encourage delivery of placenta. You may find your baby takes to it and you may even continue...'
- 6. Offer to talk to her about it again and assure her that she does not have to make any decisions but can think about it and decide even after the baby is born.
- 7. Give her information on support groups or websites, if she seems receptive and interested.
- 8. Encourage her to attend a breastfeeding support group during her pregnancy to give her an opportunity to meet mothers who are currently breastfeeding.

### References

1. Motivational Interviewing. William R. Miller & Stephen Rollnick. The Guilford Press. 1991.

### Breastfeeding support groups

1. HSE Breastfeeding Support Network  
[www.breastfeeding.ie](http://www.breastfeeding.ie)
2. La Leche League of Ireland  
[www.lalecheleagueireland.com](http://www.lalecheleagueireland.com)
3. Cuidiu-Irish Childbirth Trust  
[www.cuidiu-ict.ie](http://www.cuidiu-ict.ie)
4. La Leche League International  
[www.llli.org](http://www.llli.org)