



# WIC'S CIRCLE OF CARE FOR BREASTFEEDING MOTHERS

## How Peer Counselors Help

New mothers can be successful meeting their breastfeeding goals with the loving support of family, community, and healthcare providers. They value sharing experiences with other mothers to help overcome barriers and for positive support and encouragement when concerns arise. Numerous studies show that peer counselors have a dramatic impact on breastfeeding initiation and duration rates because they give new mothers what they need most, a trusted friend who has been there.

“Before my daughter was born, I signed up for WIC. It was the best thing I could have done. I didn't know much about breastfeeding, but thought I might breastfeed. After attending a WIC breastfeeding class and talking with my peer counselor, that might became a must.”

—WIC Mother



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

**WIC  
BREASTFEEDING  
SUPPORT**

*LEARN TOGETHER. GROW TOGETHER.*

## WHO IS A WIC PEER COUNSELOR?

A breastfeeding peer counselor with the USDA's Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is a paraprofessional who:

- Has personal breastfeeding experience;
- Lives in the community and is part of the population group served by WIC;
- Has been carefully selected by WIC and trained in basic breastfeeding techniques and counseling skills;
- Gives basic breastfeeding information and support to new mothers; and
- Desires to help mothers achieve their own breastfeeding goals.

## SCOPE OF PRACTICE FOR A WIC PEER COUNSELOR

Peer counselors help mothers with normal breastfeeding and refer mothers experiencing concerns outside the norm to health professionals.

Typically, peer counselors give information and support on:

- Reasons to breastfeed;
- How to address common barriers, including embarrassment, returning to work, and lack of support from family and friends;
- Getting a good start with breastfeeding;
- Maintaining a healthy milk supply;
- Preventing common concerns such as sore nipples and engorgement;
- Strategies for getting through the first weeks home with baby;
- How to know breastfeeding is going well;
- How to know when to call for help; and
- Resources, including breast pumps, available to mothers.

## How to Contact WIC in Your Community

WIC Clinic/Agency: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_



## WHAT DOES A PEER COUNSELOR DO?

- Provides basic breastfeeding information and support for WIC mothers.
- Contacts mothers regularly during pregnancy, the early days of breastfeeding, and until the mother chooses to wean her baby.
- Refers non-WIC mothers to other community breastfeeding resources if they are not eligible for WIC.
- Refers mothers with concerns outside the peer counselor's scope of practice to appropriate lactation experts or healthcare professionals.

## HOW YOU CAN HELP

The Circle of Care for breastfeeding mothers works best when WIC staff, healthcare professionals, and the community work together to give positive messages about breastfeeding. Some suggestions:

- Tell new mothers you serve that lots of help and support for breastfeeding is available in your community.
- Let new mothers you see know about WIC so they can access the nutrition counseling, healthy foods, breast pumps, and other support available for breastfeeding mothers.
- Refer WIC mothers to their peer counselors for breastfeeding help and support.
- Provide names of potential peer counselor candidates to WIC.

“My peer counselor helped me breastfeed my son. On one occasion, in the early days when I was having such a hard time, I told her it would be easier to just bottle feed, and she encouraged me to breastfeed. She explained the process and helped me successfully breastfeed. Now I feel happy because my son is so healthy and strong.”

—WIC Mother