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

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is a program of the USDA, Food and Nutrition Service.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.
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.

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.

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.

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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.

How to Contact WIC in Your Community
WIC Clinic/Agency: __________________________
Contact: _________________________________
Title: _________________________________
Phone: _________________________________
E-Mail: _________________________________

“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

WICBreastfeeding.fns.usda.gov