

# Teenage Parents and Breastfeeding

A Supplementary Guide to Addressing Health Inequalities:  
A North West Breastfeeding Framework for Action



The aim of this supplementary guide is to bring together the current guidance and key policy drivers to support effective commissioning of services for teenage mothers, that will in turn, lead to an increase in breastfeeding initiation and maintenance rates among this vulnerable group.

# Introduction

This guidance document has been produced for Commissioners and providers of services for teenage parents, to highlight the need for particular focus on the development and delivery of breastfeeding support for teenage parents.

This is a supplementary guide, and should be read alongside: **Addressing Health Inequalities: A North West Breastfeeding Framework for Action.**

The evidence base for what works in terms of supporting teenage mothers to breastfeed is limited, and further research is urgently needed to strengthen this area of work. However, this document outlines the rationale for targeting teenage parents as a specific group, and the guidance currently available. It sets out clear aims, goals and

recommendations for local partnerships and Children's Trusts around the Commissioning of breastfeeding services for teenage parents. It also includes some useful case studies from across the North West. A list of other relevant documents can be found in the 'References and Further Reading' section.

# Goals

- To ensure that pregnant teenagers are fully supported and encouraged to consider breastfeeding as a feeding choice.
- To recognise the important contribution that fathers and the extended family make to decisions about feeding choices.
- To support Commissioners and service providers to create environments that are welcoming to fathers and the extended family.
- To support a culture that promotes breastfeeding through educational settings.
- To create environments that promote and support breastfeeding by removing potential barriers and providing appropriate facilities.
- To engender a culture of continuous improvement and sharing of good practice around breastfeeding support for young parents across the North West.
- To encourage PCTs to collect comprehensive, ward-level breastfeeding data that includes the age of the mother.

# Recommendations

In order to affect an increase in breastfeeding initiation and maintenance rates among teenage mothers, Children's Trusts and local partnerships are encouraged to ensure that:

- The local breastfeeding strategy makes specific mention of the needs of teenage mothers and their families and how they will be met.
- All teenage mothers have access to a peer support programme that recognises the needs of their age group.
- Breastfeeding training for staff is multi-agency and includes a section on the specific needs of teenage mothers.
- Data collection allows monitoring of progress towards increasing rates of breastfeeding amongst teenage mothers.
- Workers act opportunistically with teenage mothers and their partners / families / carers to provide a constructive influence in relation to breastfeeding.
- Social marketing programmes recognise teenage parents as a specific priority audience.
- The opportunities provided by the Healthy Schools Enhancement Model to raise awareness and provide education around the benefits of breastfeeding, and contribute to the establishment of a cultural norm around breastfeeding are fully exploited.
- Priority is given to implementing the You're Welcome quality criteria in health service areas.
- Educational settings, including nurseries, schools, Pupil Referral Units, work-based learning providers, further education and higher education providers, create an understanding and welcoming environment for breastfeeding parents and identify and remove potential barriers that may undermine breastfeeding.
- Targeted support recognises and, where appropriate, challenges local cultural norms.
- Educational settings utilise the expertise of teenage parents to provide peer support.
- Teenage parents are represented on user groups such as school councils and maternity service liaison committees etc. to ensure the needs of young parents are considered when making decisions about service development and delivery.



# Local Case Studies

Many local areas are working to increase young people's knowledge and understanding of the importance of breastfeeding through educational programmes.

## Gaining knowledge through education

'Sophie's Choice' is a short piece of drama about breastfeeding that was developed with local community mothers. The drama was created with 13 / 14 year olds in mind and aimed to provide the school students with an opportunity to consider breastfeeding as the optimal way to feed babies. We wanted to help students 'think' about breastfeeding as 'normal', and learn in a way that is interesting and fun. Sophie's Choice was scripted and directed by a local actress, Nicky Hargreaves, and has been shown in local schools and at national and international conferences. The student and teacher feedback was excellent!

The students watched the play involved and then were involved in feedback and discussion, and offered a handout to reflect on the session. The learning outcomes include:-

- Understand the health benefits of breastfeeding and the risks of formula feeding.
- Understand some environmental implications of formula feeding.

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- Consider why mothers choose and maybe not choose to breastfeed.
- Challenge personal views / thoughts on breastfeeding with reference to breastfeeding in public, breasts as body organs designed to produce milk for babies.
- Be provided with an opportunity to consider how to make breastfeeding more fashionable.
- Learn about breastfeeding in order to help with informed decision making in the future, and improve health.

We aim to have a society where everyone is aware of the major health benefits of breastfeeding through including breastfeeding awareness in the education curriculum for young people. It is our dream that all teenagers at school will enjoy breastfeeding awareness education, empowering them to make informed choices when the time comes. This work reached second place in the 2009 North West NHS Innovation awards.



In Ashton, Leigh and Wigan young mothers receive targeted breastfeeding support from the Teenage Pregnancy Midwife. They are offered a first consultation at 18-20 weeks and then invited, along with their partner if appropriate, to attend a young parents' antenatal education session.

At these sessions, parents are encouraged to discuss their thoughts and feelings about breastfeeding through a range of fun and interactive teaching aids and games.

Young parent volunteer Breastfeeding Peer Supporters are also present at the sessions to support the discussion, give reassurance, and share tips. One young mother, who is actively breastfeeding, attends regularly to allow other young parents-to-be to observe and ask questions. Post delivery, young parents are invited to return with their new baby for continued information and support. Most young parents take up the invitation.

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In Sefton, the 'Breastfeeding Treasure Box' is used in a range of small group settings as an informative, visual and interactive tool designed to aid discussion about, and promote the positives of, breastfeeding. It is not a stand alone tool, and the knowledge and enthusiasm of the group facilitator is essential.

However, it is a useful tool to stimulate learning, challenge preconceptions, build the knowledge and experience of each group and encourage change in beliefs and attitudes. In recently evaluated programmes, between 92% and 98% of participants described the tool as fun, felt it aided learning, and would recommend it to others. Training has now been offered to a broader range of workers to enable the box to be used more widely. A healthy weight box has also been developed and work is underway to produce a box for use with young people about smoking.

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# Local Case Studies

**Many local areas are working to provide services that welcome teenage parents and create an environment that supports breastfeeding. This is a challenging area of practice and commissioners of services for young parents should ensure that a robust evaluation process is in place so that the effectiveness of interventions can be assessed.**

In Blackburn with Darwen, as part of the Baby Friendly Initiative community standards, staff have implemented an antenatal evidence-based intervention in three low breastfeeding initiation rate areas with high teenage pregnancy rates. As part of the intervention, all pregnant women are enjoying one-to-one home visits at around 25 weeks gestation, with either the Public Health Midwife or the Teenage Pregnancy Midwife, dependent on the age of mother. The visits are open to a 'significant other' in the woman's life, and last about 1 – 1 ½ hours, discussing what the woman thinks and feels about breastfeeding; her life experiences of breastfeeding to date; the benefits and management of breastfeeding; and fitting breastfeeding into every day life.

To date, a further 3 areas have been chosen to offer the intervention, due to the success of increasing breastfeeding initiation rates in the early months of delivery.

**Contact: Sue Henry, Infant Feeding Coordinator, Blackburn with Darwen PCT and East Lancashire Hospital Trust.**

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In Preston, two pregnant teenager and teenage mums' support groups have been working to increase the initiation and continuation of breastfeeding through regular contact with the Specialist Midwife for Teenage Pregnancy and Little Angels Breastfeeding Peer Supporter sessions. The work is supported by the Pregnancy and Parenthood Learning Mentor, and the Riverbank Children's Centre Outreach Worker. Antenatal information and education is provided on a regular basis, in small quantities, throughout pregnancy. Good quality electric breast pumps have also been made available to those young mums who are not comfortable feeding in public, whilst young mums are providing informal peer support which is helping to affect a positive move towards a breastfeeding culture among their peers.

**Contact: Emma Ashton, Specialist Midwife – Teenage Pregnancy, Preston, Chorley and South Ribble, Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust**

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In Knowsley, a young mum was introduced to a 'Bosom Buddies' breastfeeding support group which supports the midwifery service by attending the 'Stork Club', a monthly parent education session, to highlight the benefits of breastfeeding and promote their service. The group which is now a social enterprise, has trained 39 peer supporters, 12-15 of whom are actively involved currently. The group also runs a 24hr telephone helpline on a voluntary basis. Following introduction to the group, the young mother has completed La Leche League peer support training and has become an active peer supporter within the group; a regular volunteer on the helpline; and Secretary of the group.

**Contact: South Kirby Children's Centre, [www.southkirkby.chlidrencentres.org](http://www.southkirkby.chlidrencentres.org) 0151 443 3257**

or

**PALS, 0800 073 0578**

**for the nearest Breastfeeding Bosom Buddies group.**

In Liverpool, the Teenage Pregnancy Midwife provides individualised sessions around the benefits and practicalities of breastfeeding throughout the pregnancy and after birth, and follows this up with phone and text support. Support is offered to the young mother and her partner.

**Contact: Sue Thompson, Teenage Pregnancy Midwife, Liverpool Women's NHS Foundation Trust**

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In Liverpool, the Family Nurse Partnership (FNP) explores the physical and emotional benefits of breastfeeding, using universally available materials, such as 'the Pregnancy Book' and 'Off to the best start', alongside specific FNP materials, which stimulate conversation and aid discussion about the client's knowledge and understanding of breastfeeding, whilst exploring the benefits and realities of breastfeeding. Family Nurses have the opportunity to visit the client frequently therefore the topic of breastfeeding can be readdressed at different visits during pregnancy, and a client's commitment to breastfeeding can be supported through lots of encouragement and praise.

**Contact: Liverpool Family Nurse Partnership Supervisor, 0151 296 7978**

or

**FNP Support Officer, 0151 296 7974**



## Evidence Base

for increasing rates of breastfeeding with teenage mothers

Evaluations of the Sure Start Plus and Family Nurse Partnership programmes have provided some clear evidence that early identification; dedicated support from a lead professional; and an appropriately

skilled workforce with access to specialist support, where necessary, form the basis for an effective support package for teenage mothers.

## Key Approaches

towards young-people-friendly services

**This document should be read in conjunction with: Getting maternity services right for pregnant teenagers and young fathers (Revised edition 2009) DCSF/DH. It contains a wealth of information and practical tips on working with teenage parents and creating a welcoming and positive environment. A copy can be downloaded from <http://publications.everychildmatters.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/DCSF-00673-2009.pdf>**

In summary, Getting maternity services right for pregnant teenagers and young fathers:

- Explains why there is a need to focus on teenage mothers and young fathers.
- Highlights barriers faced by young people accessing services.
- Offers examples of key approaches such as providing flexible services; involving peers in providing support; how to challenge beliefs, assumptions and low expectations; and the benefits of using an empowering approach.

## References and Further Reading

1. Public Health North West (2008) Addressing Health Inequalities: A North West Breastfeeding Framework for Action. DH NW
2. Dept for Children, Schools and Families (2007) Teenage Parents Next Steps: Guidance for Local Authorities and Primary Care Trusts. London DCSF
3. Dept for Children, Schools and Families (2008) Teenage parents: who cares? A guide to commissioning and delivering maternity services for young parents. London DCSF
4. Department of Health (2007) You're Welcome Quality Criteria: making health services young person friendly [www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk)
5. Dept for Children, Schools and Families / Department of Health (2009) Local Programme Handbook. A Guide to the Healthy Schools enhancement model. London DCSF/DH [http://resources.healthyschools.gov.uk/Content/pdf/Enhancement/10118\\_Guidance%20for%20Local%20Programmes%20final%20210909.pdf](http://resources.healthyschools.gov.uk/Content/pdf/Enhancement/10118_Guidance%20for%20Local%20Programmes%20final%20210909.pdf)
6. Dept of Children, Schools and Families / Dept of Health / (2009) Commissioning local breastfeeding support services. London. DH/DCSF
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