

# STATEMENT ON THE UNICEF UK BABY FRIENDLY INITIATIVE

**In response to the blog by Madeleine Morris, Huff Post Parents, 21<sup>st</sup> October 2015**

The Unicef UK Baby Friendly Initiative is a universal programme, designed to reach all families regardless of feeding method.

Our revised standards which were published in 2012, aim to give all babies the best possible start in life, through helping build strong loving relationships between mother and child, supporting breastfeeding, and ensuring mothers who bottle feed are given accurate information and trained support with both feeding and nurturing.

Effective, empathetic communication between health professionals and mothers is key to achieving our standards, as is a holistic, mother-centred approach (for more information, see our [Guide to having meaningful conversations with mothers](#)).

Information about the well documented benefits of breastfeeding needs to be available for families, but where a mother needs or wants to bottle-feed, extra support and advice is provided to ensure that nurturing behaviours that occur naturally with breastfeeding (such as skin contact, responsive baby-led feeding, eye contact, closeness with the mother as the primary care giver) are understood and take place as much as possible.

The Baby Friendly Initiative unifies evidence, policy and practice by working collaboratively across governments, public services, the voluntary sector and families. We work within maternity, health visiting, neonatal and early years services, as well as in universities, supporting these services to implement our standards around care for mothers and babies.

Our standards cover a large range of activities including;

- Building close and loving relationships between mother and baby, antenatally and postnatally
- Skin to skin contact for mothers and babies straight after birth, or as soon as possible thereafter
- Offering the first feed (whether breast or bottle) in skin contact
- Keeping baby close, responsive feeding (whether baby is breastfeeding or bottle feeding)
- Maximising the amount of breastmilk a baby receives
- Safe preparation of formula milk if a mother is not breastfeeding
- Ensuring that there is no commercial promotion of formula milk in health settings, as advertising is designed to influence behaviour towards buying a product

The standards are designed to ensure health professionals have the right knowledge and skills to be able to support all women, irrespective of feeding type, to feed their babies and build a close and loving relationship.

The standards are audited through a staged process, assessing both staff education and women's views, to ensure services are meeting women's needs at local level.

Guidance is available on our website to support health professionals to give mothers and babies the best possible care around our standards. Further information can be found on our website:

- [Guide to the Baby Friendly Initiative standards](#)
- [Guide to having meaningful conversations with mothers](#)
- [Building a happy baby](#): a leaflet for parents on building a close and loving relationship with their baby, including responsive feeding
- [A guide to infant formula for parents who are bottle feeding](#): this includes information on the different types of infant formula available, and guidance on responsive bottle feeding

Breastfeeding has irrefutable benefits for mothers and babies, however many mothers in the UK stop breastfeeding earlier than they would like to. The UK has some of the lowest breastfeeding rates in Europe, and it is widely recognised that mothers are likely to encounter difficulties and challenges with breastfeeding, in a predominantly bottle feeding culture. It is thus our responsibility to improve conditions for breastfeeding women, in order to improve breastfeeding rates as recommended by the WHO. This can be done through the Baby Friendly Initiative, an evidence-based, effective programme recommended by NICE and at government level across all four UK nations.

For more information and evidence supporting the baby friendly standards see our report, [The evidence and rationale for the Unicef UK Baby Friendly Initiative standards](#).