

UNICEF UK BABY FRIENDLY INITIATIVE

STATEMENT ON BABY BOX SCHEMES



November 2017 (updated September 2018)

Unicef UK has received a number of queries about various 'Baby Box' schemes* and whether these are compatible with the Baby Friendly standards. As yet, there is little evidence regarding the efficacy of such schemes and so it is not possible to state whether they offer benefits or harm to babies and their parents. Therefore, giving a cardboard box to parents will not in itself affect Baby Friendly accreditation.

However, when considering whether to engage in such schemes there are a number of issues to consider, some of which could affect the implementation of the Baby Friendly standards and therefore accreditation:

- Consider the claims being made about the box and how these may influence behaviour. Some schemes imply that the boxes will reduce the incidence of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), even though there is little evidence to support this. Such claims could be confusing for parents and affect their perception of important safety messages related to SIDS such as the avoidance of co-sleeping on a sofa, alcohol and smoking. See our [Co-sleeping and SIDS Guide for Health Professionals](#) for more details on this.
- Consider the safety of the boxes, including liability issues associated with health professionals assembling and distributing boxes. For more information on this, see the [Lullaby Trust's statement on baby boxes](#).
- Commercial schemes will be expecting to make a profit and it is important to consider how this will be made and the possible effect on babies and their parents. Considerations should include advertisements in the boxes, promotion of websites that could then lead to advertising, and importantly what will happen to the data collected from parents given a box. Such data can be extremely valuable, as it enables future contact with parents to promote products and in some cases could also be sold on to third party companies. Baby Friendly accreditation would be affected if such activity led to parents' receiving information that was not accurate and effective, or if it led to violations of the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes (the Code) – see our [Health Professionals' Guide to Working within the Code](#).
- From the point of view of the parent, anything distributed by health professionals can be seen as an endorsement. Consider how this implied endorsement could affect the way parents perceive messages regarding the Baby Friendly standards (e.g. on skin-to skin-contact, responsive feeding and [caring for babies at night](#)).

- Consider whether / how much health professional time is involved in assembling, distributing and communicating instructions about the boxes and whether this can be justified in terms of current workloads.

Further reading

- [Working within the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes: A Guide for Health Professionals](#)
- [Caring for your Baby at Night](#) leaflet for parents and accompanying health professionals' guide
- [Co-sleeping and SIDS: A Guide for Health Professionals](#)
- [Lullaby Trust advice on Baby Boxes](#)
- Bartick, M, Tomori, C, and Ball, H, Babies in boxes and the missing links on safe sleep: Human evolution and cultural revolution, Maternal & Child Nutrition, [DOI: 10.1111/mcn.12544](#)

**All women in Scotland can opt in to receive a free, non-means tested baby box at 37 weeks pregnant funded by the Scottish Government. It has no commercial intent and governance for the contents and safety remains with the Government. No mother details are given to commercial companies.*