

BREASTFEEDING





THE DECISIONS FOR LIFE CAMPAIGN FOCUSES ON BREASTFEEDING IN THE WORKPLACE

Decisions for Life is a national and international campaign aimed at young women in the workplace. The Decisions for Life campaign empowers young women as they face challenges in their work and at home.

In our campaign activities many young mothers speak about the challenges they face in trying to continue breastfeeding when they return to work. Very few companies have breastfeeding facilities available and young working mothers often face discrimination and harassment when they try to continue breastfeeding their young babies.

This Decisions for Life Booklet on focuses on breastfeeding in the workplace. Young working mothers speak about their experiences and as the campaign we highlight ways we can protect our right to breastfeed in the workplace.



Breastfeeding: Personal Stories

"I did not breastfeed because I had to return to work after two weeks as I am the only breadwinner in my household. I worked odd hours, and did not know much about expressing. I tried expressing during the day but I could only fill half a cup as I did not know about a breast pump. It was also difficult to me to get a quiet space to sit and express freely without interruption had to express in the toilet. My mother had to take my baby because I could not cope with working and taking care of him as I was also recovering from giving birth." - Anele

"My baby is three months old. I decided to resign from work as I felt it was too early for me to go back because my baby was still breastfeeding. I have not introduced her to anything else as the doctor advised me to exclusively breastfeed for six months. If I known that there is legislation concerning breastfeeding, would not have resigned as I loved my job. But it was not as precious as my child. I think new mothers need to be informed about this legislation as most of us know nothing about it. We think of unions as 'fighters' because of what we see in the news, and did not know that they also do such good work." - Soraya

"I stopped breastfeeding after a month because I did not have enough milk. My mother said that I was making the baby hungry and introduced formula. After introducing my baby to formula she refused the breast. After learning about the benefits for both the mother and the baby, I will definitely breastfeed my child." - Carol

Why is breastfeeding an important issue for young women workers?

Many women work during pregnancy and many return to work while they are still breastfeeding.

Human milk, through breastfeeding, is the best food for babies and young children. It builds brain power and healthy bodies.

Breastfeeding also encourages a close, nurturing relationship between mother and child.

However, some women think that they need to give up their work in order to breastfeed their children. Others find it difficult to find a space to breastfeed in their workplace. And others think they should feed their baby formula, so they can go back to work more easily.

Breastfeeding women may make up only a small percentage of the workforce at any one time, but protection for breastfeeding is important to all. Child-bearing and breastfeeding are roles that only women can carry out, yet they benefit everyone.

Working women in particular need protection against discrimination and harassment because they often face difficulties when breastfeeding at their jobs.

How does breastfeeding benefit a family?

- Replacements for breastmilk, such as formula, are expensive. The money that is saved by breastfeeding, instead of using formula, could be used for other things such as food for the household.
- Breastfeeding also allows for longer spacing between pregnancies, which means better health for mother and child.
- Breastfed babies have a lower risk of sickness. This saves money which might otherwise be spent on health care.

How can women continue to breastfeed once they go back to work?

Women can take a breastfeeding break whilst at the workplace.

What is a breastfeeding break?

A breastfeeding break is a period that a breastfeeding mother takes during her work day for either breastfeeding her child or expressing her milk. Breastfeeding breaks are paid time.

In South Africa, in terms of the Code of Good Practice on the Protection of Employees during Pregnancy and after the Birth of a Child (which forms part of the Codes of the BCEA), arrangements should be made for employees who are breast-feeding to have breaks of 30 minutes twice per day for breastfeeding or expressing milk each working day for the first six months of the child's life.

Why do women need a breastfeeding break?

Breaks enable mothers to keep up a good supply of breastmilk. A breastfeeding mother makes milk 24 hours a day.

If the mother is employed at a workplace where there are on-site child-care facilities, such as a creche, then she can easily use her break to feed her child.

However, many workplaces do not have onsite child-care facilities. When the mother's job takes her away at a time the baby normally feeds, her baby can drink milk that she has expressed (by hand or with a breast pump) and left with the care-giver of the baby. To make enough milk for her baby's needs, the mother must also express the milk that gathers in her breasts during the time that she and her baby are apart. This is why breastfeeding breaks are important.

Up to what age should breastfeeding breaks be taken?

Breastfeeding breaks are most important from birth until the child is six months old. This is also the legal amount of time that a mother can take breastfeeding breaks (the first six month's of her child's life).

Is 30 minutes twice a day enough time?

Obviously every woman and her child are different. But on average, it should take about 15 - 20 minutes for a mother to express her milk. Then she still needs to wash her hands, and prepare the milk for storage, which brings the time up to 30 minutes.

If the mother has her child on-site, then 30 minutes should be ample time for a feed.

What if a mother would prefer to take the break in one session, to shorten work hours?

A woman may prefer to put her breastfeeding breaks together and take that time at the beginning or the end of her normal work day. This could be because she lives far from her job, or there are no proper facilities for childcare near her workplace. This allows her to work a shorter day and have an extra hour at home with her baby. She might still choose to express milk during her usual lunch break.

What kind of space or facilities are needed for breastfeeding breaks in the workplace?

The ILO Recommendation 191 says that “where practical, provision should be made for the establishment of facilities for breastfeeding under adequate hygienic conditions at or near the workplace.”

Basically, a clean space with room to sit down, privacy, access to clean water and a secure storage place for expressed milk is needed. Cleanliness, accessibility and security are key features.

Important note: A toilet is not suitable for this purpose!

What legislation and laws are there to protect pregnant and breastfeeding women?

As mentioned earlier, there is the Code of Good Practice on the Protection of Employees during Pregnancy and after the Birth of a Child. This code is issued in terms of section 87(1)(b) of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA) 75 of 1997.

The Code is intended to guide all employers and employees concerning the application of section 26(1) of the BCEA, which prohibits employers from requiring or permitting pregnant or breastfeeding employees to perform work that is hazardous to the health of the employee or that of her child. The Code also contains a section on the right to breastfeeding breaks.

What are some of the hazards that can affect pregnant and breastfeeding women in the workplace?

- Physical hazards (including exposure to noise and work in extreme environments).
- Ergonomic Hazards (including heavy physical work, repetitive work, and standing for long periods).
- Chemical hazards (contact with harmful chemical substances may cause infertility and foetal abnormalities. Some chemicals can be passed to a baby during breastfeeding and could possibly damage the health and

development of the child).

- Biological hazards (bacteria and viruses can affect the unborn child if the mother is infected during pregnancy. They may also be transferred through breastfeeding).

How can pregnant or breastfeeding women be protected from hazardous work?

Section 26(1) of the BCEA prohibits employers from requiring or allowing a pregnant or breastfeeding employee to perform work that is hazardous to her health or the health of her child. This means employers must assess and control risks to the health of pregnant or breastfeeding employees and that of the foetus or child.

Employers should identify, record and regularly review:

- Potential risks to pregnant or breastfeeding employees within the workplace.
- Protective measures for pregnant or breastfeeding employees.

Where appropriate, employers should also maintain a list of employment positions not involving risk to which pregnant or breastfeeding employees could be transferred.

Women should also notify their employer as soon as possible when they become pregnant, so that appropriate health and safety measures can be taken.

What are some of the obstacles facing breastfeeding women in the workplace?

- Some women do not know that it is their right to take breastfeeding breaks.
- Some employers do not know that breastfeeding breaks are legal.
- Some unions do not see the breastfeeding break as an important issue to support.
- Some workplaces do not provide a clean, private, appropriate space for women to breastfeed or express milk.
- Some women are not sure how to express milk. Expressing should be painless, quick, hygienic and cost effective.

- Some women don't believe that they can feed their child only on breast milk for six months. They worry that they need to add formula or bought milk to the diet.

How can we protect the right of women to breastfeed, particularly in their workplace?

We need to ensure that this right is known and defend it in order to allow more women to be able to breastfeed their babies for at least six months. Some of the ways include:

- Form support groups to educate and inform about breastfeeding and women's rights in the workplace.
- Arrange meetings with shop stewards to discuss the importance of this issue.
- Arrange meetings with HR in the workplace to discuss the importance of this issue.
- Organise and motivate to have clean, accessible, safe and secure spaces for breastfeeding and expressing in the workplace.
- Don't accept spaces such as toilets for this purpose.
- If possible, use this forum to advocate for on-site childcare facilities in the workplace.

How can you access the complete Code of Good Practice on the Protection of Employees during Pregnancy and after the Birth of a Child?

- Ask your employer, HR manager or shop steward for a copy.
- Find it online at <http://www.labour.gov.za/legislation/codes-of-good-practice/Basic%20Conditions%20of%20Employment/code-of-good-practice-on-pregnancy>
- You can download this version and print it out.
- Visit www.mywage.co.za and find the page on Maternity Leave in the Labour Law section. It includes information on breastfeeding and the workplace, and a link to the official Code.



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www.mywage.co.za or Labour Research Service on 021 447 1677