

Tip Sheet

Infant Feeding Informed Decision Making

Definitions

Informed consent can be said to have been given based upon a clear appreciation and understanding of the facts, implications, and consequences of an action (Black et al., 2010).

One where a reasoned choice is made by a reasonable individual using relevant information about the advantages and disadvantages of all the possible courses of action, in accord with the individual's beliefs (Bekker, 2009).

Key Messages

- For some expectant parents labour and delivery is their first experience in a medical environment and as they are confronted with decisions and choices, they may need assistance in gathering all the information they require to help them make informed decisions.
- Being informed and educated about breastfeeding and the potential risk of early unnecessary formula use is best discussed in **early in pregnancy**.
- It is not the job of a health care provider to convince people to breastfeed, or to talk them out of formula feeding. It is the job of a healthcare provider to provide individuals and families with information to facilitate the decision making process, and to support them in that decision.

The International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes

- The International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes (The Code) confirms that our actions as health care providers, including the words we choose to use, influence the view families have on different infant products.
- The intent of The Code is to contribute to the provision of safe and adequate nutrition for infants by the protection and promotion of breastfeeding and by ensuring the proper use of artificial baby milk when such use is necessary. It is important to ensure that families are aware of and understand marketing, which can sometimes be subtle or subversive, and may influence their choices. For example: why the free formula arrives on the doorstep during pregnancy, why formula companies give hundreds of thousands of dollars to health care facilities, why all free formula has an easy to read label and comes in cases that are small enough to easily distribute to mothers in hospital, and how the advertisements in magazines and on the internet are selling a product that when not used in medically indicated situations undermines the practice of breastfeeding.

Tips for Facilitating Informed Decision Conversations

- Facilitating an informed decision conversation is easier and more effective when you use open ended questions and active listening.
- Using skills in facilitation and motivational interviewing techniques can help the client come to an informed decision that supports their wishes.

Additional Resources

“Supporting Informed Decision Making” webinar, October 5, 2015

www.tegh.on.ca/bfistrategy

OPHA

Breastfeeding Position Paper, 2014

<http://www.opha.on.ca/getmedia/fe4f79f5-2be4-4bce-a7af-045cdc2defb0/Informed-Decision-Making-and-Infant-Feeding-OPHA-Position-Paper-2014.pdf.aspx?ext=.pdf>

Appendix 11.1: WHO Code Compliance Checklist

Appendix 11.2: Summary of the WHO Code

http://www.breastfeedingcanada.ca/documents/2012-05-14_BCC_BFI_Ten_Steps_Integrated_Indicators.pdf

- Approach these topics in a manner that is non-judgmental and empathetic to the mother’s views.
- Use principles of adult learning in your conversation always beginning with where the client is at in her knowledge and thinking.

Example

- Start by asking an open ended question, such as: *“Tell me what you know about breastfeeding.”*
- If the response is: *“Oh, I’m not breastfeeding because...”* use open ended questions to further explore thinking, assumptions and experiences such as *“Tell me about that. What was that like? What do you think about that?”*
- Use active listening and address knowledge gaps. Ask questions about how they made their decision and continue the conversation with: *“I am here to ensure that you have all the information that you need. It is my job to make sure you are comfortable with your decision and you do not look back and say ‘I wish someone would have told me about that.’”*
- If a mother identifies that she is planning on formula feeding, be sure to provide all relevant information. You may use language such as: *“I know you have stated you are wanting to formula feed and I support whatever decision you feel is best for you and your baby. As a (nurse, midwife, HCP etc.), I just need to ensure you are comfortable with your decision and have all the information you require. Is it ok if I just ask you a couple of question to make sure you have all the information you need? Have you done some reading or talked to anyone about formula feeding and breastfeeding? What information do you already have?”*
- You may continue with: *“Some of the information you may not be aware of... or Can I share some additional information you may wish to consider in your decision making?”*
- If a mother is sure that formula feeding is the right choice for her, continue to ask questions to ensure she has all the information she needs and educate as required. *“Do you have information about the cost of formula feeding for the full year? What type of formula do you plan to use –ready to feed/concentrate/powder? What information do you have about safely preparing and storing formula? Did you know you can reduce the risk of overfeeding by watching baby’s cues? Have you heard of cue based feeding before? Regardless of how you feed your baby doing skin to skin is really healthy, so we would encourage you to hold your baby for the first hour skin to skin.”*

“Lastly, if you change your mind and want to try breastfeeding that’s ok too, even a small amount of breastmilk when in hospital can help strengthen your baby’s immune system....it really is up to you.”

Remember that the informed decision conversation will be unique to each individual. At the end of the discussion, it is most important that the mother is informed and feels supported in her decision.

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