# Creating a Positive Workplace Culture

1. Breastfeeding and Co-Worker Attitudes

A study among employees of a company that provided a wide array of accommodations for breastfeeding, found that attitudes towards workplace breastfeeding were mostly positive. Further, employees having had a co-worker who breastfed/expressed milk during the workday exhibited more positive attitudes (than co-workers who had no direct experience). This finding belies the concern that co-workers will react negatively on witnessing the provision and use of special services for breastfeeding mothers. Rather, the implication is that having first-hand experience with a co-worker breastfeeding in the context of a breastfeeding support programme may actually engender more positive attitudes towards workplace breastfeeding.

2. Communication, Information and Encouragement

Kathryn Tyler, in How to Establish a Workplace Lactation Program, indicates that one of the biggest obstacles is society’s attitude about breastfeeding and that some education of employees is necessary. Managers, especially, need to be educated about the importance of the programme so they are willing to give breastfeeding employees the time they need to breastfeed or express milk. “You can have a pretty room sit there unused unless you have a policy that employees can have an hour break a day—two thirty-minute breaks or three twenty-minute breaks—to pump or breastfeed,” says Walker cited in Tyler. “Train supervisors to encourage employees to use it. You don’t want to have an atmosphere where employees can’t take advantage of the service because the work environment won’t permit it.”

At one particular organisation quoted in Tyler the supervisors’ main fear was: ‘How long is this going to take? An hour three times a day?’ Sceptical supervisors were surprised to realise that employees would return to work within half an hour. Another organisation which had the same experience with a supervisor who questioned the amount of time an employee spent expressing was given the actual sign-in sheets for a month which indicated that the employee never spent more than an hour total per day in the breastfeeding room. The fear that this is going to take too much time was not based in reality.

However, managers and co-workers need to offer breastfeeding employees some flexibility. For instance, one employee said, “Sometimes I had to work around meetings. Thankfully, the people I worked with were understanding" (Tyler, 2000).

3. Steps Toward Promoting Positive Employee Attitudes

**Assess the current situation**

Conducting a climate survey of employee’s attitudes will create a benchmark for the programme and gauge staff needs or areas of concern. Decide which areas to focus on and develop a plan of action.

**Supervisors and managers as role models**

Researchers have repeatedly emphasized the importance of senior staff modelling appropriate behaviours consistent with the organisations formal policies. Studies have shown that employees ARE influenced by the inappropriate behaviours of their supervisors and leaders. If differences do exist between the supervisor’s modelling or expectations and the organisation's formal code, these differences may cause the employee to receive mixed messages or to follow the status quo. Organisations in which senior staff demonstrate responsible leadership qualities and actions and set clear positive examples in implementing the breastfeeding programme will find there is a greater acceptance of the programme throughout the workplace.

**Create a positive vibe**

Ensure the programme is seen as a positive to the organisation by publicising the benefits.

**Integrate the programme**

Breastfeeding signals difference and this on its own can be enough to cause stress amongst breastfeeding employees and contribute to early weaning. Most organisations have a range of family friendly policies and practices (flexible work options to care for elderly parents, early retirement, moving house leave, etc.) as well as special programmes for different groups of the workforce e.g. quit smoking, keep fit, literacy and numeracy programmes etc. Ensure that the breastfeeding programme is seen as just one of many strategies that your company is implementing to have a happy and productive workplace.

**Keep everyone informed and included**

Ensure effective communication of key objectives. Employees who feel like they're being kept "in the loop" with workplace changes and strategies are more likely to keep and maintain positive attitudes. Discuss or update on progress of the programme regularly through staff meetings, newsletters, intranet etc. Allow employees to ask questions and respond to information. Ward off change resistance with inclusion. Allowing involvement of all employees in formulating and executing initiatives for being breastfeeding and baby friendly, fosters an attitude of openness and encourages employees to express their ideas (and concerns).

**Monitor through ongoing dialogue**

Monitor workplace attitudes by ongoing communication. Initiate regular and spontaneous assessments of workplace satisfaction (on all aspects of the workplace, not only the breastfeeding programme) through meetings and surveys. Encourage employees to share ideas on improving workplace relations and performance. Institute an open door policy that makes employees feel like their opinions are valued and appreciated.

**Recognise and Reward**

All staff in all situations respond to positive recognition. Whether by offering incentives for positive action and performance or simply praising work well done, employees who know that their efforts aren't being overlooked are less likely to complain about perceived special treatment of others and are also encouraged to work harder

**Co-workers who are resistant**

There are always some employees who are resistant to change and will oppose a breastfeeding friendly workplace strategy. These people may need some one-on-one counselling to inform them of the company’s policies and the requirement of all employees to adhere to those policies. Effective workplaces train their supervisors in grievance management so they can better manage any interpersonal tensions that may arise.

4. Additional Innovative Ideas

* **Maintain contact with employees on parental leave**. Keep them up to date with the organisation so they feel connected even though they are away from the workplace. Encourage sharing of details of others on parental leave for mutual support.
* **Discuss breastfeeding in the workplace initiatives** with all potential employees, so those considering your workplace are aware of support available to them.
* **Provide a convenient car park** for the employee to be able to quickly go to feed her baby and return to work, or get home or to daycare as soon as possible after work. Or for the child’s carer to bring baby in to be breastfed.
* **Establish and encourage a support group** for breastfeeding employees in your organisation. The group could include other mothers who have successfully breastfed and/or you could coordinate with other workplaces in your building or close locality. La Leche League can provide resources and/or group facilitators in your area: [www.lalecheleague.org.nz](http://www.lalecheleague.org.nz/)
* **Give pregnant women a celebration pack** when they go on parental leave which includes breastfeeding information and resources as well as the organisation’s and the government’s policies and entitlements. Consider including a small gift such as a child’s book, a baby toy, or a La Leche League membership: http://www.lalecheleague.org.nz/membership
* **Send the family a card** or letter of congratulations when an employee notifies you of her pregnancy and/or the birth of her baby. Send flowers and/or a gift if budget allows.
* **Provide information on your intranet or in your newsletters** about your breastfeeding friendly programme. Include information on your policies and facilities, the benefits of breastfeeding to the organisation, and successful stories of women combining breastfeeding with a return to work.
* **Run a staff workshop** and organise a guest speaker to provide information and discuss any concerns with all employees and/or senior management about establishing a breastfeeding policy. Contact [bfw@bfw.org.nz](mailto:bfw@bfw.org.nz) for ideas of speakers.
* **Provide & fund telephone or email access to a lactation consultant** to advise, support and assist breastfeeding employees as needed. [www.nzlca.org.nz](http://www.nzlca.org.nz/)
* **Allow baby to come to work:** Make the workplace clean and safe for a baby to be at work; generally babies don’t start to crawl and still have regular sleeps throughout the day until around 9+ months of age.
* **Consider establishing a workplace crèche:** Investigate (with other employers in the area) how to set up a child care facility on site or nearby. Further details available from: http://www.education.govt.nz/early-childhood/running-an-ece-service/starting-an-ece-service/
* **Conduct before and after surveys.** Collect some baseline information before you commence your breastfeeding friendly workplace programme then collect again 6-12 months after the programme's implementation. This could include:
  + Statistics on numbers of women of childbearing age, numbers of pregnancies, known breastfeeding rates, turnover rate among women who take parental leave, Absenteeism rates among new parents etc.
  + Attitudinal questions about employee engagement, morale, loyalty, attitude towards breastfeeding employees, etc
  + Knowledge questions about awareness of company policies and programmes
  + Feedback from breastfeeding employees and other staff regarding the programme