

UNICEF UK BABY FRIENDLY INITIATIVE LEARNING OUTCOMES

MEDICAL STUDENTS

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the new Unicef UK Baby Friendly Initiative learning outcomes for medical students. These learning outcomes are intended to set a standard for the level of knowledge and understanding of infant feeding that could be reasonably expected of a newly qualified doctor. They are designed to be incorporated into medical students' undergraduate curricula.

This is part of a suite of learning outcomes setting standards for the undergraduate courses of relevant healthcare practitioners who care for new babies, their mothers and families in UK public services.

BACKGROUND TO THE BABY FRIENDLY INITIATIVE

The Baby Friendly Initiative is a World Health Organization / Unicef accreditation programme designed to improve practice within healthcare settings in relation to infant feeding and parent-infant relationship building.

It sets standards for maternity, neonatal and community services and provides internal audit and external assessment to measure progress and sustainability over time. Services meeting the standards receive the prestigious Baby Friendly accreditation award, recognising their excellent practice.

The programme's work to support breastfeeding is based on extensive and resounding evidence that breastfeeding saves lives, improves health and cuts costs in every country worldwide, rich and poor alike.¹ However, breastfeeding is an emotive issue in the UK, because so many families have not breastfed, or have experienced the trauma of trying very hard to breastfeed and not succeeding. To ensure best outcomes for babies, their mothers and families, we



must work to remove the myriad of barriers to breastfeeding in the UK – social, cultural, economic, physical and practical – to help mothers to breastfeed for as long as they wish.

A key part of this involves improving healthcare support around infant feeding. Our work has helped support this provision in maternity and community services, requiring that all qualified health professionals in Baby Friendly accredited services are educated to provide evidence-based and effective infant feeding support.

There is strong evidence for the Baby Friendly programme as a key intervention for supporting breastfeeding.² Studies looking at the impact on UK breastfeeding rates have shown that giving birth in a Baby Friendly facility increases breastfeeding initiation.^{3,4} International studies have also shown a positive impact of Baby Friendly on breastfeeding initiation and duration, including in the US,^{5,6} Turkey,⁷ Switzerland,⁸ Belarus⁹ and in multi-country studies.^{10,11}

The Baby Friendly programme is recommended in numerous government and policy documents across all four UK nations, including National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidance,¹² the 2019 NHS Long Term Plan for England,¹³ Scotland's Improving Maternal and Infant Nutrition: A Framework for Action,¹⁴ Northern Ireland's Breastfeeding – A Great Start: A Strategy for Northern Ireland 2013-2023¹⁵ and the All Wales Breastfeeding Action Plan 2019-2024.¹⁶



EXPANSION OF THE PROGRAMME INTO UNIVERSITIES

As the Baby Friendly programme became more established in health services, it was realised that this progress could be better supported if newly qualified health professionals entered the workplace already having a strong foundation of knowledge about infant feeding.

As a result, the Baby Friendly university programme was established, initially setting standards and learning outcomes for undergraduate midwifery and health visiting/public health nursing courses. These courses can progress to full Baby Friendly accreditation by undertaking internal audit and external assessment, using a similar process as that provided for healthcare settings.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF THE UNIVERSITY PROGRAMME: THE NEW LEARNING OUTCOMES

Building on this success, we have now developed a suite of learning outcomes for other courses including for medical, pharmacy, dietetic and children's nursing students.

These learning outcomes were developed by relevant clinical and academic experts to articulate the minimum knowledge and understanding it would be reasonable to expect from a health professional at the point of qualification. The aim is for students to gain an understanding of infant feeding, how to support it in practice, and how to access further learning.

Supporting materials such as slide sets, guidance for lecturers and e-learning are planned. While there are no plans to provide full assessment and accreditation for these courses at this time, it is hoped that the learning outcomes will provide a stimulus to universities to start to consider what should be covered in relevant curricula and then to take action to make that a reality.

We still have a long way to go before the health service as a whole, from doctors to dieticians to pharmacists, is enabled to support families effectively. However, with these new learning outcomes we hope to move in the right direction; towards an environment in which all families receive consistent infant feeding support and guidance throughout their whole journey in the health service.

FURTHER READING

- Guide to the Baby Friendly standards in health services: unicef.uk/babyfriendly-standards
- Guide to the Baby Friendly standards in pre-registration midwifery and health visiting university courses: unicef.uk/babyfriendly-university-standards
- About Baby Friendly: unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/about/
- Evidence for the Baby Friendly standards: unicef.uk/babyfriendlyevidence

THE LEARNING OUTCOMES

The learning outcomes are grouped into three broad themes that cover the essentials of infant feeding.

1. THE VALUE OF HUMAN MILK AND BREASTFEEDING

The value of human milk and breastfeeding for the short and long term health outcomes of babies and their mothers is well established.^{1,17,18,19,20} It protects children from a vast range of illnesses including infection, diabetes, asthma, heart disease and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), as well as obesity, a major public health priority.^{21,22,23,24} For mothers, breastfeeding protects against breast and ovarian cancers and heart disease.^{1,25,26,27} In addition, it supports the mother-baby relationship and the mental health of both baby and mother.^{28,29}

2. SUPPORTING INFANT FEEDING

Whilst the Baby Friendly Initiative has made strong progress in improving care in maternity and community services, there are gaps in support provision beyond these services, and rates remain lower than in many other high income countries.³⁰ In the UK, most women want to breastfeed but many face difficulties early on and eight out of ten stop before they

want to.³¹ It is vital that all relevant health professionals understand how breastfeeding works and how to support the initiation and continuation of breastfeeding effectively. It is also important that they have the knowledge and skills to offer evidenced-based and practical support when babies are not breastfed.

3. INFANT FEEDING IN CONTEXT

Infant feeding in the UK is a highly contentious and controversial issue, influenced by commercial, social, cultural and political factors. Understanding the context in which babies are fed supports health professionals to be empathic and realistic in their communication and support.



THEME 1: THE VALUE OF HUMAN MILK AND BREASTFEEDING

- 1 Be able to describe the main constituents of human milk and their function
- 2 Appreciate the importance of human milk and breastfeeding to human health.

THEME 2: SUPPORTING INFANT FEEDING

- 3 Understand the anatomy and physiology of lactation
- 4 Be able to list the key practices that facilitate the initiation and maintenance of breastfeeding
- 5 Understand the role of the doctor in supporting and advocating for breastfeeding
- 6 Understand the role of the doctor in supporting parents to formula feed as safely as possible.

THEME 3: INFANT FEEDING IN CONTEXT

- 7 Appreciate the wider social, cultural and political influences on infant feeding
- 8 Understand the importance of the WHO International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and subsequent WHA resolutions (the Code) and how it impacts on practice.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Below are the key topic areas to be included in order to cover each theme and enable the students to meet the learning outcomes. A mapping exercise can help the university to assess how far the topics are already covered and assessed in the curriculum, and to identify and plan for any additions to modules or design alternations needed.

It is important to ensure that the learning outcomes are covered in sufficient detail to enable the students to effectively implement the Baby Friendly standards in

practice. Formal or informal assessment of the students' learning against the learning outcomes is highly recommended in order to ensure that the teaching content and methods have been effective.

In the future we will be making teaching materials available to assist lecturers to enable students to meet these learning outcomes. This will include a slide pack to help lecturers deliver the content to students, e-learning for students and assessment examples.

THEME 1: THE VALUE OF HUMAN MILK AND BREASTFEEDING

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Be able to describe the main constituents of human milk and their function
- Appreciate the importance of human milk and breastfeeding to human health.

TOPICS

- Constituents of human milk – including colostrum and mature breastmilk
- Protective and developmental functions – including the effect on the immune system, microbiome, developmental programming and growth
- The role of human milk and breastfeeding in promoting and protecting public health.

THEME 2: SUPPORTING INFANT FEEDING

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Understand the anatomy and physiology of lactation
- Be able to list the key practices that facilitate the initiation and maintenance of breastfeeding
- Understand the role of the doctor in supporting and advocating for breastfeeding
- Understand the role of the doctor in supporting parents to formula feed as safely as possible.

TOPICS

- Functional anatomy of the breast
- Physiology of lactation – including hormonal influences on milk production and the role of the Feedback Inhibitor of Lactation (FIL)
- How to get breastfeeding off to a good start – including skin-to-skin contact, positioning and attachment and responsive feeding
- Assessing and supporting effective breastfeeding – including appropriate referral and prescribing
- Best practice when babies are not breastfed – including support for sick and preterm babies and for parents who are formula feeding.

THEME 3: INFANT FEEDING IN CONTEXT

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Appreciate the wider social, cultural and political influences on infant feeding
- Understand the importance of the WHO International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and subsequent WHA resolutions (the Code) and how it impacts on practice.

TOPICS

- Social patterns and why some women do not breastfeed – including relevant data and the effect on health inequalities
- Evidenced-based interventions that promote, support and protect breastfeeding – including the WHO / Unicef Baby Friendly Initiative
- The Code: rationale, history and impact on practice
- Where and when to access evidence-based resources.

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