

Grandmother, Lisa, with grandchildren Iylah, Zaniah, Faith and Zaya-Mai, enjoy a community event at the park.

UNICEF UK BABY FRIENDLY INITIATIVE ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Online | 18-19 November 2026 | unicef.uk/bfconf

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EVENT INFORMATION

Accessing the conference

Visit **rcpvirtual.co.uk/e/bfi2026** and click Livestream to see the talks. Login details will be sent to the email address provided at booking. For booking queries contact **bfi@unicef.org.uk**.

Questions for speakers

Use the chat box next to the video screen to submit questions for speakers during the presentations.

Photography notice

Please refrain from taking photos of babies or young people who appear in the slides and please be mindful of what you share online.

Technical help

Please first check your internet connection and switch browsers to Chrome/Firefox. If accessing via a work computer, please raise issues with your IT department or try a different device. Remember, if you have any issues accessing live, catch-up is available following the event.

Certificates

Certificates of attendance are electronic and will be emailed to all delegates at the end of the conference.

Wellbeing notice

Please be aware that there may be sensitive content shared during this event, including but not limited to personal stories of lived experience, references to birth trauma, mental health challenges and child loss. The following organisations can offer support:

- **National Breastfeeding Helpline** (provided by The Breastfeeding Network and Association of Breastfeeding Mothers)
- **La Leche League breastfeeding support**
- **NCT infant feeding support line**
- **Bliss: For babies born premature or sick**
- **Maternal Mental Health Alliance**
- **Sands: Saving babies' lives. Supporting bereaved families**
- **Birth Trauma Association**
- **LGBT Mummies**
- **Mind**

Posters

Throughout the event, delegates can access 21 posters at **unicef.uk/bfconf** which share innovations and research on infant feeding and relationship building.

You can vote for your favourite poster at the link below or by using the QR code opposite:

unicef.uk/poster2026

Evaluations

Delegates will receive an email inviting them to complete our online evaluation. The link is also available below or via the QR code opposite.

unicef.uk/evaluation2026

On-demand access

Access to all talks is available until 5pm on 18 December using the same URL and login details used to access the event.

Follow along on Instagram @babyfriendlyuk using #bfconf

FIND OUT MORE

Subscribe to our email newsletter to keep up-to-date with Baby Friendly: **unicef.uk/bf-subscribe**

Learn about course bookings for 2027 - dates have started to be announced, but do fill up quickly: **unicef.uk/bf-courses**

Interested in going Baby Friendly? Learn about the accreditation process: **unicef.uk/bf-accreditation**

Access resources for health professionals and parents on a range of issues around caring for babies and families: **unicef.uk/bf-resources**

The ATTUNE Study: The most comprehensive review of evidence and implementation relating to the UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative undertaken to date is now available: **unicef.uk/attune**

WELCOME



A very warm welcome to the 2026 UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative Annual Conference (Virtual).

The Annual Conference is an event which brings so many of us together through a shared commitment to ensure babies, their mothers, parents/primary caregivers and families receive the very best standards of care and support each and every day within UK public services.

This year we are delighted to bring together more than 1,600 delegates from around the UK and internationally for our virtual conference which will feature fresh insights, compelling evidence and practical learning across two packed days.

Our speakers will bring research, lived realities and practical insight into conversation, helping us to consider both the progress being made and the work still ahead. We look forward to them leading us in an exploration of a range of fascinating and important topics, from why tackling high infant formula prices in the UK matters, to the role dads play in supporting breastfeeding, as well as how exclusive breastfeeding is linked to long-term changes in marks on DNA.

Throughout this year's programme we will also hear the latest insights from The ATTUNE Study and key findings from the Infant Feeding Survey 2024, as well as the latest evidence around bed sharing and babywearing. We will hear how Scotland is working to create an environment in which breastfeeding can thrive, the latest in neonatal care developments, and so much more.

As a conference taking place virtually this year, the event offers an important opportunity to connect across regions, roles and services. We encourage you all to join in and take part by submitting questions, sharing your reflections and considering how the ideas presented might inform your own setting.

We hope you will find moments across the conference that challenge your thinking, affirm the importance of your work and leave you with fresh ideas to take back to colleagues and families. Most of all, we hope you feel part of a community, learning from one another and working towards lasting change.

Thank you for bringing your time, experience and curiosity. We are delighted to welcome you and hope you enjoy the conference.

Shereen Fisher

Shereen Fisher
Programme Director, UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative

Please note: This conference is a space for open, thoughtful and respectful discussion. In line with UNICEF UK's values, we are committed to creating an environment where everyone feels heard, valued, and safe to share ideas. Together we aim to foster a spirit of collaboration, kindness and mutual respect as we work towards positive change for every baby – and everyone impacted by the programme.

TIMETABLE

Day 1: Wednesday 18 November 2026	
Chair: *Lara Strangwood, UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative*	
09.30	Introduction and housekeeping
09.35	**Anna Kettley, UNICEF UK** Welcome to day 1 of the conference
09.45	**Shereen Fisher, UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative** Celebrating progress through headwinds and tailwinds, with the Baby Friendly Awards
10.30	**Lee Urquart, Scottish Government** *and* **Janet Dalzell, UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative** From possibility to progress: Supporting a Scotland where breastfeeding can flourish
11.00	Break and posters
11.15	**Professor Vivien Swanson and team, University of Stirling** Neglecting the 'smellscape'? Implications for mother-infant communication, breastfeeding guidelines and practice
12.00	**Professor Amy Brown, Swansea University** Why tackling high infant formula prices in the UK matters for infant health, parent wellbeing, and protecting breastfeeding
12.40	Q&A – Morning speakers
13.00	Lunch and posters
Chair: *Sarah Pickford, UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative*	
14.00	**Scott Mair, Fatherhood Solutions, Improving Performance in Practice (iPiP)** The role dads play in breastfeeding: Building confidence, strengthening relationships and improving outcomes
14.30	**Dr Justice Reilly, Spectrum Lactation** Spectrum Lactation – A diverse image library of the lactating breast
15.00	Break and posters
15.10	**Smita Hanciles, UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative** Baby Friendly education and Qualification Framework Programme Awards
15.25	**Natasha Powell, Department of Health and Social Care** Findings of the 2024 Infant Feeding Survey
15.55	Q&A – Afternoon speakers
16.15	Close

Day 2: Thursday 19 November 2026	
Chair: *Karen Read, UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative*	
09.30	Introduction and housekeeping
09.35	**Jess Brown Fuller MP, Chair of Infant Feeding and Inequalities APPG** Welcome to day 2 of the conference
09.45	**Professor Helen Ball, Durham Infancy & Sleep Centre** Bed-sharing and babywearing: Talking to parents about safe and responsive infant care
10.20	**Dr Doretta Caramaschi, University of Exeter** Exclusive breastfeeding linked to long-term changes in marks on DNA
10.50	Break and posters
11.15	**Leah Hazard, Midwife and Author** Empowering staff in changing times: Integrating national reports into clinical practice
12.00	**Dr Ellie Atkins, London Neonatal ODN** Putting babies and families at the centre of neonatal care
12.35	Q&A – Morning speakers
13.00	Lunch and posters
Chair: *Smita Hanciles, UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative*	
14.00	**Professor Gill Thomson and Dr Victoria Hall Moran, University of Lancashire** Sharing the insights from the ATTUNE study
14.30	Q&A and conversation with Professor Gill Thomson, Dr Victoria Hall Moran and the Baby Friendly team
14.50	**Laurel Wilson, Mother Journey, LLC** Maternal wellbeing, the infant microbiome, and emotional regulation
15.35	Q&A – Laurel Wilson
15.45	**Anne Woods, UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative** Closing the conference
16.00	Close

CHAIR BIOGRAPHIES

DAY 1

Morning: Lara Strangwood, Professional Lead, UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative

Lara Strangwood is a Professional Lead for the UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative supporting maternity services and universities across the UK to implement the Baby Friendly standards. Lara is a registered midwife and has a fellowship of the higher education academy with a keen interest in education. As the Baby Friendly Lead Lecturer, Lara supported the University of Northampton on their success with achieving the Baby Friendly Gold Award in 2023.

Afternoon: Sarah Pickford, Professional Lead, UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative

Sarah Pickford is a Professional Lead for the UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative. Sarah supports community, neonatal and hospital-based children's services in their journey to implement the Baby Friendly standards. Sarah is a registered paediatric nurse and health visitor and has worked across the country in a number of different settings. She was the Infant Feeding Lead in Bedford and Luton health visiting service and led on their accreditation journey to the Baby Friendly Gold Award. Sarah is also the East of England Lead for the National Infant Feeding Network (NIFN).

DAY 2

Morning: Karen Read BFIqL, Professional Lead, UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative

Karen Read is a Professional Lead for the UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative supporting units across the UK to implement the Baby Friendly neonatal and hospital-based children's standards. Karen is a registered children's nurse and has worked in neonatal services and infant feeding roles throughout her career. She supported the neonatal unit at the Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust to gain the first Baby Friendly neonatal unit accreditation in 2015.

Afternoon: Smita Hanciles BFIqL, Deputy Programme Director, UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative

Smita Hanciles is the Deputy Programme Director for the UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative, leading on education and the Baby Friendly 'Leader of Change' Qualification Programme. She trained as a nutritionist and worked in higher education before moving on to hold roles in Public Health and NHS Trusts in London where she worked to implement the Baby Friendly standards in community services.



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Mother, Ildika, breastfeeds 12-week-old twins Sofia and Kende at a children's centre engaged in the Baby Friendly programme.

SPEAKER ABSTRACTS AND BIOGRAPHIES

DAY 1

Welcome to day 1 of the conference
Anna Kettley, UNICEF UK

Anna will open the conference by welcoming the Baby Friendly delegates to two days of shared learning, fresh evidence and new perspectives. Drawing on her recent visit to the Dyson Centre for Neonatal Care in Bath, she will reflect on seeing how the Baby Friendly standards bring compassionate, relationship-centred care to life, with parents recognised as partners in their babies' care. Anna will connect the work of the Baby Friendly Initiative with UNICEF UK's wider commitment to supporting and upholding children's rights from the earliest moments of life. She will also consider how the newly published ATTUNE Study offers an important opportunity to consider the evidence alongside the experiences of families and practitioners, and what these insights mean for Baby Friendly's future direction.

Anna Kettley is the UNICEF UK Chief Influence and Impact Officer, responsible for advocacy, programmes, and safeguarding. Anna has been working in the charitable sector for over two decades, specialising in the delivery of large-scale transformational programmes and innovative influencing strategies that champion children's rights, tackle inequity, and drive social change on both a domestic and international level. Anna has a specialist Master's in Charity Management from the Bayes Business School and a Postgraduate Diploma in Climate Change and International Development. She is currently a Trustee for the Polar Citizen Science Collective, working in a voluntary capacity. Prior to joining UNICEF UK, Anna held senior roles at Save the Children and Place2Be.

Celebrating progress through headwinds and tailwinds, with the Baby Friendly Awards
Shereen Fisher MSc, LLB, BFIqL

In this opening session, Shereen will set the scene for two days of learning, reflection and connection. The talk will introduce a wide-ranging programme exploring the latest evidence and lived realities shaping infant feeding and care, and will cover what delegates can expect to learn from the newly published ATTUNE Study. Shereen will also reflect on the Baby Friendly Initiative's journey over the past year, exploring the progress made, the challenges that remain and the opportunities ahead. Together, these discussions will aim to celebrate progress, confront ongoing challenges and inspire delegates to share learning and strengthen practice for babies, their mothers and families.

Shereen Fisher brings both compassion and leadership to her role as Programme Director of the UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative. With a career rooted in championing infant feeding support, including ten years as Chief Executive of the Breastfeeding Network, Shereen is a passionate advocate for families, health professionals and the systems that support them. Her strategic leadership of the Baby Friendly Initiative is grounded in evidence-based care and strengthened by her contributions to national policy. Shereen chairs the Institute of Health Visiting's MECSH Advisory Group, supporting the development of targeted early years support for families, and has contributed to the MHRA's Safer Medicines in Pregnancy and Breastfeeding Consortium and NICE's review of the Maternal and Child Nutrition Guidelines. Shereen also represents the UK as a board member of the International Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative Network.

From possibility to progress: Supporting a Scotland where breastfeeding can flourish
Lee Urquart, Scottish Government and Janet Dalzell, UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative

Scotland's breastfeeding journey is one of sustained ambition, partnership and improvement. Breastfeeding has become an established public health priority, recognised as a key contributor to improving outcomes for babies, mothers and families. This presentation explores how the Scottish Government, NHS Boards, local authorities, communities, third sector partners and Baby Friendly have worked together to create the conditions for breastfeeding to flourish. Through a focus on evidence, including the voices of mothers and new parents, quality improvement and reducing inequalities, Scotland has embedded breastfeeding within policy, practice and culture. The session will share milestones, learning and challenges, highlighting the power of collective action. Delegates will gain insights into how commitment, collaboration and unwavering determination across system levels can help build a future where every baby has the opportunity to thrive.

Lee Urquart originally trained as an occupational therapist, soon developing a strong interest in improving outcomes for babies, children and young people. She later held a strategic leadership role within NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, leading multidisciplinary health and social care teams across children's community paediatric services and child and adolescent mental health services. During this time, she qualified as an improvement advisor through the Institute for Healthcare Improvement. Since joining the Scottish Government in 2019, Lee has worked across a broad portfolio of improvement programmes across early years. Since 2021, her work has focused on supporting national and local improvement initiatives that contribute to Scotland's breastfeeding stretch aim and the wider ambition to improve maternal and infant health and wellbeing.

Janet Dalzell has been involved with the implementation of the Baby Friendly standards since 1996 as a midwife, neonatal nurse and Infant Nutrition Coordinator in infant nutrition. She has worked with the UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative since 2016 and was appointed as Professional Lead for Scotland in 2018. The Baby Friendly programme in Scotland has been strongly supported by the Scottish Government and has enabled significant progress with Achieving Sustainability accreditation in maternity, neonatal, community and university settings. This has influenced the importance of infant feeding and relationship building at senior management level across all Scottish NHS Boards, leading to quality improvement approaches which support the maintenance and understanding of the impact of the standards on feeding outcomes for women, families and communities. Janet provides support and coaching to staff across all services, encouraging consistent implementation of the standards.

Neglecting the 'smellscape'? Implications for mother-infant communication, breastfeeding guidelines and practice
Professor Vivien Swanson and team, University of Stirling

Difficulties initiating and establishing breastfeeding are common, and the sense of smell (olfaction) is a crucial but neglected part of human communication which may help to address this. This talk will explain why this is important and describe our international multidisciplinary project which aims to establish how smell helps breastfeeding communication between a mother and newborn baby in the first days and weeks of life and provide recommendations for future practice. Findings from the scoping review of existing gaps in reference to olfaction within international breastfeeding guidance will be discussed, as well as implications for practice. Early results from focus groups with clinical staff in Scotland exploring barriers to, and facilitators of, using smell in practice will also be discussed in the context of what practice changes might be helpful to enhance breastfeeding experiences for women and their babies in future.

Professor Vivien Swanson is a professor of health psychology at the University of Stirling. She has significant experience of research and teaching in academia and has worked in a health psychology advisory role in NHS Education for Scotland. Her research focuses on psychosocial factors, e.g. beliefs, norms and confidence, and their influence on health behaviours. This is particularly relevant for improving breastfeeding experiences and maternal and infant health and wellbeing in the early years. She has published widely on the psychology of breastfeeding behaviour, including different international contexts. The recent collaboration with multidisciplinary researchers studying olfactory communication is perhaps most exciting and poses important implications for infant and maternal health outcomes and health practice in the longer term. Professional interests relate to training health psychologists and professionals, and health psychology practice to promote health and wellbeing.

Why tackling high infant formula prices in the UK matters for infant health, parent wellbeing and protecting breastfeeding

Professor Amy Brown, Swansea University

Infant formula milk, an already expensive product, has risen significantly in cost in recent years. Between March 2021-April 2023, prices rose by an average of 24% with increases up to 45%. The Competition and Markets Authority's infant formula and follow-on formula market report recently identified this was greater than increases in production costs. Media reports showed this was having a significant impact on families. This study, funded by the Medical Research Council, set out to a) understand the impact of high infant formula milk prices on parents, b) how they coped, c) what products they bought and why and d) what the solutions were. A total of 498 parents who used formula (261 were struggling with costs and 217 were not) and 158 professionals and volunteers working in infant feeding, parenting and food insecurity support took part. Data highlights an urgent need for intervention, including enhanced emergency provision pathways, stronger controls on marketing, price regulation, and enhanced breastfeeding support.

Professor Amy Brown is professor of maternal and infant health based in the School of Health and Social Care at Swansea University where she directs the research centre 'LIFT' (Lactation, Infant Feeding and Translational Research). The aim of LIFT is to conduct infant feeding and early parenting research that matters to parents and professionals and makes a real difference to the support that parents receive around infant feeding and caring for their baby. With a background in psychology, Amy has spent the last twenty years exploring psychological, cultural and societal barriers to breastfeeding, alongside experiences of perinatal mental health and caring for babies. Amy has published over 100 research papers and has led numerous research projects exploring infant feeding experiences. Her research underpins global policy and guidelines on infant feeding and wellbeing, and she is regularly invited to present evidence to governments, policymakers and healthcare organisations.

The role dads play in breastfeeding: Building confidence, strengthening relationships and improving outcomes

Scott Mair, Fatherhood Solutions, Improving Performance in Practice (iPiP)

Breastfeeding is often viewed as a relationship between mother and baby, yet evidence demonstrates that fathers and partners have a significant influence on breastfeeding initiation, confidence and continuation. The quality of support mothers receive from those closest can be one of the strongest predictors of breastfeeding success. This talk explores the unique role fathers and partners play before birth, in the early postnatal period and throughout the breastfeeding journey. Drawing on current research, lived experience and practical examples from UK maternity services, the session will examine how professionals can prepare fathers to become informed, confident supporters rather than passive observers. The talk covers why fathers matter in breastfeeding outcomes; understanding the emotional journey for fathers and partners; practical ways dads can support breastfeeding without feeling excluded; supporting challenges such as pain, exhaustion, cluster feeding and self-doubt; communication strategies that strengthen the parenting partnership; how services can become more father-inclusive while protecting breastfeeding; common myths surrounding fathers and breastfeeding; and practical tools and resources professionals can use within maternity, neonatal and community services. Participants will leave with a greater understanding of how engaging fathers is not about shifting attention away from mothers, but strengthening the whole family system. When fathers feel informed, included and valued, they are better equipped to support breastfeeding, maternal wellbeing, parent-infant attachment and positive long-term family outcomes.

Scott Mair is the Founder and Director of Fatherhood Solutions, an organisation dedicated to improving outcomes for fathers, partners, babies and families through father-inclusive practice. A former British Army Infantry soldier and father of seven, Scott combines professional expertise with lived experience to support services engaging fathers from pregnancy through early childhood. He works nationally with NHS Trusts, local authorities, family hubs, universities and voluntary organisations to improve paternal mental health, strengthen parent-infant relationships and embed father-inclusive approaches across maternity, neonatal and early years services. He has delivered training to thousands of professionals and regularly contributes to national policy, research and service development. Passionate about ensuring fathers are recognised as an essential part of the parenting team, his work focuses on practical, evidence-informed approaches to strengthen family relationships, improve breastfeeding outcomes and create better experiences for mothers, babies and partners.

Spectrum Lactation – A diverse image library of the lactating breast
Dr Justice Reilly, Spectrum Lactation

Spectrum Lactation is a free, open-access resource of breast images in diverse skin tones developed in the UK by volunteers from peer support, medical and IBCLC backgrounds. Recognising that black and brown skin is under-represented in medical and lactation educational resources, it seeks to fill the gap that leaves people struggling to get a diagnosis or timely support. Spectrum Lactation is committed to the resource being not-for-profit for its lifetime. The presentation outlines the process and challenges of creating an ethical, equitable resource, and its future direction.

Dr Justice Reilly lives in Glasgow with her husband and four daughters, where she has been a La Leche League leader since 2018. She is a trustee of Medics in Lactation Community, a peer support network for breastfeeding doctors in the UK and Ireland, and practices breastfeeding medicine. Justice is a faculty member of Amma Birth Companions, a charity which delivers perinatal services to some of Scotland's most vulnerable families. Through this advocacy, she recognises how health, social and racial inequalities shape our lives and breastfeeding outcomes. She was a founding member of Spectrum Lactation in 2020.

Baby Friendly education and Qualification Programme Awards
Smita Hanciles, BFIqL, UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative

Education has the power to change not only what we know, but how we think, lead and act. This session will explore how Baby Friendly education is supporting individuals and organisations to move from passionate individual effort to sustainable, system-wide change. It will introduce the new Progressing Baby Friendly: Success and Sustainability course, highlight the ambitions of the education policy paper, celebrate the graduates of the Baby Friendly Qualification Programme, and look ahead to the next Leader of Change cohort. The session will consider how education can develop confident change makers who influence culture, inspire others, and create lasting improvements to care for babies and families.

Smita Hanciles is the Deputy Programme Director for the UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative, leading on education and the Baby Friendly 'Leader of Change' Qualification Programme. She trained as a nutritionist and worked in higher education before moving on to hold roles in Public Health and NHS Trusts in London where she worked to implement the Baby Friendly standards in community services.

Findings of the 2024 Infant Feeding Survey
Natasha Powell, Department of Health and Social Care

This presentation summarises findings from the Infant Feeding Survey in England 2024. The survey examined key aspects of infant feeding, including breastfeeding practices, the use of infant formula and vitamins, the introduction of solid foods, and the support received before and after birth.

Natasha Powell is a Senior Scientific Officer at the Department of Health and Social Care and a Registered Public Health Nutritionist. She specialises in nutrition research, dietary assessment, nutrient analysis, dietary data handling and population health. As project manager for the Infant Feeding Survey in England 2024, published in June 2026, Natasha helped deliver valuable insights into infant feeding practices across England. She has also contributed to the National Diet and Nutrition Survey. Natasha uses robust data to strengthen understanding of dietary behaviours and support evidence-based public health policy and practice.

DAY 2

Welcome to day 2 of the conference
Jess Brown-Fuller MP, Chair of Infant Feeding and Inequalities APPG

As Chair of the APPG on Infant Feeding and Inequalities, Jess Brown-Fuller MP will highlight why breastfeeding, infant feeding and early relationships matter, the importance of reducing inequalities in support and outcomes, and the value of continued attention to babies and families within wider health and early years policy discussions. Jess will consider emerging evidence on infant feeding inequalities and the importance of ensuring every family can access high-quality, evidence-based support, regardless of their circumstances. Reflecting on the value of prevention and early intervention during the first 1001 days, the session will consider how practitioners, service leaders, researchers and policymakers can help improve outcomes. It will also explore the role of the Infant Feeding and Inequalities APPG in addressing gaps and driving progress across these areas.

Jess Brown-Fuller MP is the Liberal Democrat MP for Chichester, party spokesperson for Justice and Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Infant Feeding and Inequalities. Jess is deeply embedded in her local community and is a champion for both residents and businesses. During the pandemic, she established an innovative volunteer organisation to support local residents, a model that was successfully replicated across the country. Soon after her election, Jess became Chair of the APPG on Infant Feeding and Inequalities. The group raises awareness of infant feeding and allows MPs, peers and policy stakeholders an opportunity to meet regularly to ensure that this topic remains a priority for HM Government with a view to reducing inequalities and improving health.

Bed sharing and babywearing: Talking to parents about safe and responsive infant care
Professor Helen Ball, Durham Infancy & Sleep Centre

This talk summarises how to discuss bed sharing and babywearing with parents in a way that is safe, responsive, and evidence-based. Drawing on the latest research on infant sleep, bed sharing, breastfeeding, and adult-worn slings and baby carriers, it will highlight the benefits of close contact alongside the importance of safe positioning and airway protection. The session will consider how to give non-judgmental guidance that helps families make informed choices. The aim is to support infant well-being, parental confidence, and early relationships.

Professor Helen Ball is professor of anthropology and director of the Durham Infancy & Sleep Centre at Durham University, where she has spent three decades studying infant sleep, night-time infant care, and the parent-infant sleep relationship from a biosocial perspective. Her research bridges anthropology, biology, and public health, and has informed UK and international guidance on safe sleep, breastfeeding, and infant care. She founded the Baby Sleep Information Source (BASIS) and has authored over 130 publications on infant sleep and parenting including her recent book How Babies Sleep (2025: Penguin Random House).

Exclusive breastfeeding linked to long-term changes in marks on DNA
Dr Doretta Caramaschi, University of Exeter

The talk will present recently published research on markers of breastfeeding found in blood of exclusively breastfed children years later. These markers are part of epigenetic processes, a series of chemical changes to DNA that influence how active our genes are and how they function. Depending on the genes involved, they can reveal pathways where breastfeeding has a lasting biological effect and can help us understand the protective role of breastfeeding on children's health.

Dr Doretta Caramaschi is a lecturer and researcher based at the University of Exeter psychology department, focussing on early life influences on children's development and mental health, including infant feeding practices. She is interested in biological processes that establish themselves during critical phases of early life, such as infancy and adolescence, and their consequences for lifelong mental health outcomes. One process she researches extensively is epigenetics, a series of early

life changes in the way our DNA works, mostly conducting analyses on large population and clinical datasets. With a PhD in neuroscience, she has published 32 scientific papers in peer-reviewed academic journals, at the intersection of biology and behavioural studies. She also has a background as a trained breastfeeding peer support volunteer in the Bristol area and lived experience as a breastfeeding mother of two children.

Empowering staff in changing times: Integrating national reports into clinical practice
Leah Hazard, Midwife and Author

In the wake of numerous reviews and investigations across the UK, now is a time of transformative potential in maternity services. However, the deluge of recommendations for clinical practice can be overwhelming, and staff may wonder how they can integrate the themes of recent reports into their daily conversations with service users. This talk will explore findings from national and local reviews and offer practical suggestions for enhancing your conversations around infant feeding and the maternity journey.

Leah Hazard has been a registered midwife since 2013, rotating through areas of NHS maternity and supporting thousands of families along the way. She is the author of The Father's Home Birth Handbook, Hard Pushed: A Midwife's Story (Sunday Times bestseller) and Womb: The Inside Story of Where We All Began (published in 20 languages). She is a proud trustee of Amma Birth Companions and an outspoken advocate for a safer, more equitable maternity service. Leah's next book, Birth Wars: Delivering Safe Maternity in a Changing World, is published in January 2027 and available to pre-order.

Putting babies and families at the centre of neonatal care
Dr Ellie Atkins, London Neonatal Operational Delivery Network

A neonatal admission is a challenging time for families. It may have followed a challenging journey through conception and pregnancy or may have come with no warning at all. Families are then asked to take in and process complex information, get to know their baby and learn to navigate the hospital environment at a time of high emotional arousal. In this session we will think about the various perspectives on a neonatal admission and think about how we support the whole staff team to keep babies and families at the centre of the work.

Dr Ellie Atkins leads psychological provision for London neonatal units which includes developing and growing services, supporting psychological professionals, and helping staff develop psychologically informed skills to improve care for all families. Ellie has a Doctorate in Clinical Psychology and has worked with babies, children, young people and families for almost 30 years. Her doctoral research explored the experiences of children, young people and parents following an intensive care admission. She worked at St George's NHS Foundation Trust, providing psychological support across paediatric and neonatal intensive care and supporting families following the death of a child. Ellie is a member of Neonatal Leads for Psychological Practice and is actively involved with the Association of Clinical Psychologists. She is passionate about developing psychologically informed neonatal environments where families and staff receive thoughtful, compassionate and trauma-informed care.

Sharing the insights from The ATTUNE Study
Professor Gill Thomson and Dr Victoria Hall Moran, University of Lancashire

This presentation will share overarching insights from the completed ATTUNE Study, exploring the evidence and impact of the UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative. This study involved a series of integrative reviews and case studies undertaken across four health settings. We will provide an overview of the work, key findings, and recommendations for the Baby Friendly standards, for Baby Friendly implementation and for research.

Professor Gill Thomson currently works as Professor in Perinatal Health at the University of Lancashire in North West UK. She holds a BSc and MSc in Psychology, and a PhD in Midwifery. Gill leads the Maternal, Parental and Infant Nutrition and Nurture (MAINN) research unit. Her research focuses on maternal, parental, and infant health, with interests in infant feeding, perinatal mental

health, and peer support models of care. Gill has expertise in a range of methodologies including process evaluations, mixed-methods studies, systematic reviews (scoping, qualitative, mixed-method, interpretive) and qualitative approaches.

Dr Victoria Hall Moran works as Reader of Maternal & Child Nutrition at the University of Lancashire in North West UK. She holds an MMedSci in Human Nutrition, and a PhD in Women's Health. Victoria is Editor in Chief of the international journal, Maternal & Child Nutrition. Her research focuses on infant feeding, maternal nutrition and micronutrient deficiency ('hidden hunger'). Victoria has expertise in a range of methodologies including mixed-methods, systematic reviews (scoping, quantitative, qualitative, mixed-method) and qualitative approaches.

Maternal wellbeing, the infant microbiome, and emotional regulation
Laurel Wilson, Mother Journey, LLC

Emerging research, including findings in Paediatric Research (2026), suggests the maternal psychological state is a primary architect of the infant's internal biological environment. This presentation explores the "gutbrain-parent" axis, examining how maternal depression and anxiety are associated with shifts in the infant gut microbiome. These microbial changes are linked to heightened nervous system sensitivity in infancy, which potentially can manifest as challenges with emotional regulation and increased reactivity. This discussion will look at the interplay between lactation and maternal mental health support as critical interventions. Breastfeeding/chestfeeding serves not only as a delivery system for essential prebiotics and bioactive compounds that stabilize the infant microbiome but as a critical tool for co-regulation. By supporting parents' mental health, we can support the infant's developing nervous system, promoting a healthier gut-brain connection. Participants will gain an understanding of the biological pathways connecting parental mood to infant gut health and learn why integrated support, combining lactation with mental health care, is essential for nurturing healthy infants.

Laurel Wilson is a TEDx and international speaker, women's health and perinatal specialist, integrative nutrition health coach, international board-certified lactation consultant, speaker consultant, educator, and author. Laurel has authored two books, The Attachment Pregnancy and The Greatest Pregnancy Ever. Her passion is blending today's recent scientific findings with mind/body/spirit wisdom to highlight the magnitude and importance of the perinatal period. Laurel has been joyfully married to her husband for three decades and has two wonderful grown sons, whose difficult births led her on a path towards helping emerging families create positive experiences. She believes that the journey into parenthood is a life-changing rite of passage that should be deeply honoured and celebrated.

Closing the conference
Anne Woods, UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative

Anne will bring the 2026 Baby Friendly Annual Conference to a close by reflecting on two inspiring days of talks, insights and learning from our speakers, as well as sharing the winner of the poster vote. Anne will revisit some of the key evidence presented over the event, reflecting on what we have learned and what this means for supporting babies, their mothers, parents/primary caregivers and families. Anne will also look ahead to what comes next, sharing exciting announcements for the 2027 conference before wrapping up this year's event and offering some final reflections for delegates to take away.

Anne Woods is the Deputy Programme Director of the UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative. She is responsible for the management and oversight of the assessment process for maternity, neonatal, health visiting and early years services and universities. Anne also works as a lead assessor and facilitator of the various courses that Baby Friendly provides. With a background in midwifery spanning more than 30 years, Anne has a wealth of experience in all aspects of midwifery, including as an infant feeding coordinator and supervisor.

POSTERS

During the breaks, you are invited to view a selection of posters at **unicef.uk/bfconf** which showcase examples of improving care for babies, their mothers, parents/primary caregivers and families. Titles and authors of the posters can be found below. Please note content included within the posters should not be seen as endorsement by the UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative.

Vote for your favourite poster at the following link or use the QR code on this page: unicef.uk/poster2026

1. **Improving access to infant feeding support through a seven-day tiered community model:** *Amanda Brooks, City Healthcare Partnership - St Helens Wellbeing*
2. **Right call, right time: Proactive support for infant feeding in Leeds:** *Sally Goodwin Mills and Sophie Ames, Leeds City Council / Leeds Community Healthcare*
3. **Mum 2 Mum breastfeeding peer support project: Supporting white working class women from pregnancy through birth and beyond:** *Sally Etheridge and Lyndsay Poore, Leicester Mammas*
4. **Delivering early breastfeeding support:** *Jenna Millar, Caroline Buchan, Gillian Russell, Anna Preston, Claire Bell and Sheikha Thomas, NHS Lothian*
5. **Wakefield's infant feeding journey – A step-by-step guide:** *Sarah Colley and Emma Mara, Public Health Wakefield Children's team*
6. **Beyond Gold: Building on excellence in infant feeding and relationship building at RGU:** *Emma Hay-Higgins, Sally Macdonald and Stacey Paterson, Robert Gordon University*
7. **A qualitative scoping review on familial experiences of neonatal infant feeding support:** *Shilanne Giles, Moriam Mustapha, Louise Wells, Dr Erin Stella Sullivan, Department of Nutrition & Dietetics, King's College London, London Neonatal Operational Delivery Network, NHS*
8. **First-time fathers' experiences of supporting infant decisions and the factors that influence this activity:** *Dr Jen Menzies, Northumbria University*
9. **Bringing in UNICEF hospital-based children's services BFI:** *Tracy McGillivray, Nicola Tait and Helen Anderson, NHS Lothian*
10. **Infant feeding and beyond:** *Emma Williams and Fiona Murray, NHS Grampian*
11. **Increasing breastfeeding rates in Tameside through the integrated infant feeding team:** *Fiona Munro-Muotune, Helen Haley, Sian Holden, Rebecca Astley, Kat Corker, and Lindsey Coffey, Tameside and Glossop Integrated Care NHS Foundation Trust*
12. **How prepared are UK healthcare professionals to support the emotional dimensions of infant feeding? Findings from the BREATHE Approach study:** *Rachael Gardner, Dr Yan-Shing Chang, Professor Amy Brown, King's College London*
13. **Improving completion of the UNICEF BFI data on Badger – A quality improvement project:** *Dr Jade Crist, St George's University Hospital*
14. **Standardised parent education and resources to improve skin-to-skin rates in the neonatal unit:** *Clare Abela, Nikki Sargeant, Ruth Champion and Remya Anitha, Princess Alexandra Hospital Trust*
15. **The breastfeeding experiences of women living with a disability and/or long-term health condition in Scotland – Results of a survey:** *Sarah Edwards, Emma Williams and Mairi McLachlan, Scottish Breastfeeding Collaborative*
16. **Views and experiences of postpartum women regarding alcohol, alcohol-free and low-alcohol drinks, and breastfeeding – A mixed methods study:** *Heather Hopper, Kate Maslin, Katie Edwards and Jill Shawe, University of Plymouth*
17. **Building a Baby Friendly university:** *Kimberley Jones, Birmingham City University*

18. **The case for Child Death Overview Panels (CDOPs) to recommend UNICEF's Baby Friendly Initiative accreditation progression:** *Kiana Louise Bowden, London Borough of Newham and National Child Mortality Database*

19. **Integrating sustainability and virtual reality into breastfeeding education with midwifery, child nursing and health visiting students – Evaluation of a pilot study:** *Yan-Shing Chang, Kate Frith, Charlotte Martins, Emma Jefferson, Holly Brackenboro, Alison Meinel, Kerstin Lelubre, Behnam Jafari Salim, Kaabah Asif, Alexandra Oladimeji, Megan Rajan, Sylvester Odame-Amoabeng , King's College London*

20. **From learning gap to curriculum development – Using formative simulation to make breastfeeding visible in paramedic education:** *Lisa Clarke, Jamie Scott and Niall Carty, Ulster University*

21. **An all-Wales approach to breastfeeding in the workplace:** *Rachel Evans and Nikki Davies, Public Health Wales*

ABOUT THE BABY FRIENDLY INITIATIVE

The Baby Friendly Initiative is working to transform healthcare for babies, their mothers, parents, primary caregivers and families in the UK.

Introduced to the UK in 1994, the Baby Friendly Initiative has worked with UK public services for over 30 years to support families with infant feeding and developing close and loving relationships so that all babies get the best possible start in life. The Baby Friendly programme operates as part of a wider global partnership between the World Health Organization and UNICEF. In the UK, the programme supports maternity, neonatal, community and hospital-based children's services to transform their care and with universities to ensure that newly qualified midwives and health visitors have the strong foundation of knowledge needed to support families.

ABOUT UNICEF

UNICEF exists to build a better world for every child. As the world's leading children's organisation, UNICEF delivers life-saving essentials and long-term solutions that transform futures. From clean water, nutritious food and vaccines to education and protection from violence, we reach more children than any other organisation. Our work is powered by collaboration — with families, communities, partners and governments in over 190 countries — because real change happens when we act together. Every initiative, whether immediate relief or system strengthening, is guided by one principle: putting children first.

With nearly 80 years of proven expertise, a global network, and a commitment to innovation, UNICEF combines urgency with sustainability. We act fast in emergencies and invest in lasting progress, ensuring every penny counts. Impartial and non-political, we are unwavering in defending children's rights and safeguarding their futures. Together, we are building a better world for every child.

UNICEF IN THE UK

The UK Committee for UNICEF (UNICEF UK) is a registered charity dedicated to raising vital funds for UNICEF's emergency response and long-term development work worldwide, while championing lasting change for children everywhere. Our mission goes beyond fundraising. We advocate for policies that protect child rights, challenging practices that harm children both in the UK and internationally. And as one of 33 UNICEF national committees, we bring global expertise to local impact.

In the UK, we work where childhood begins and grows — in hospitals where babies are born and in schools where children learn and thrive. Every effort is focused on one goal: ensuring every child has the same chance to shine.