

WIC Breastfeeding Curriculum- Topic of the Month

MARCH 25, 2024

WIC staff can best support pregnant and lactating participants by participating in training on anticipatory guidance, counseling, and education. The supportive services offered at WIC have had a positive impact on breastfeeding rates over the years and have helped many parents successfully breastfeed. The new WIC Breastfeeding Curriculum is the perfect opportunity to learn new skills or sharpen existing ones.

Importance of breastfeeding education

Everyone working in the WIC clinic has a role in supporting participants and offering information and resources they need to make their breastfeeding journey a success. By promoting healthy lifestyles and nutrition choices, our work in the WIC Program will make a difference in the lives of many parents and children. After pregnancy, breastfeeding is an important next step in development of the infant brain and has multiple lifelong health and developmental benefits. Support makes all the difference in making parents feel capable and empowered in feeding their infant.

Read more about [WIC's Promotion and Support of Breastfeeding](#).

History

The history of breastfeeding support in the WIC program started at its inception in 1975. Over the years, the guidance has expanded and learning tools were developed to assist staff and support parents. This led to the development of a standardized, competency-based curriculum to ensure that all staff attain a level of proficiency in the skills required to promote and support breastfeeding in the WIC setting. The trainings developed included the *Using Loving Support to Grow and Glow in WIC* and *Loving Support Through Peer Counseling: A Journey Together* trainings, which were rolled out in Minnesota in 2012.

In 2018, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) asked Cathy Carothers of [Every Mother, Inc](#) to update and replace the existing breastfeeding curriculum. The development of the new training uses updated information based on a robust research and feedback process, including online feedback, in-depth interviews, and expert panels. The *Grow and Glow in WIC* provided basic foundation about breastfeeding, but the new curriculum's design is more comprehensive.

When Every Mother, Inc went to visit the various sites across the country, they discovered WIC staff didn't have a good understanding of their role or scope in breastfeeding support. It was then decided the new structure would be divided up based on specific staff roles. The new curriculum would cover how to apply the information and counsel families.

While meeting with WIC staff and families across the county, Every Mother, Inc captured videos of best practices to use throughout the training to help staff better understand the concepts identified. Additionally, the training highlights new and updated evidence-based breastfeeding information making the content developed more relevant for WIC staff because it focused on research from the past five years.

Staff benefits

The curriculum is structured in four tiered levels of learning based on staff roles. Each level builds on one another to take staff to higher levels of learning based on their role in WIC. Each level of training enables the learner to dive deeper into content specific to their role. This enables staff to be fully aware of their roles and responsibilities supporting breastfeeding and their scope of practice in WIC. The curriculum also emphasizes counseling, skill building, and applying the learned techniques to WIC specific situations. This helps all WIC staff get on the same page for consistent messages about breastfeeding and can strengthen the WIC team.

Staff will learn to:

- Clarify WIC's role in supporting breastfeeding.
- Clarify each staff person's role within the WIC agency.
- Emphasize scope of practice for each staff member to help everyone understand their roles and others' roles.
- Provide support services appropriate to their level and within their scope of practice.

Expanded topics

In addition to updating the evidence in the WIC Breastfeeding Curriculum, new topics were added to provide WIC staff with more knowledge and tools to better support families in meeting their infant feeding goals. New and expanded topics include:

- Counseling in difficult or complex situations
- Engaging partners and grandparents
- Maintaining milk production when separated
- Breastfeeding assessment – including care plans and case studies
- Low milk production and supplementation
- Complex maternal and infant problems impacting lactation
- Management tools (breastfeeding aids, alternative feeding devices, etc.)

Staff training options

Levels 1, 2, 3, and 4 of the WIC Breastfeeding Curriculum are available for self-study on the [Minnesota Department of Health \(MDH\) Learning Center](#). Staff can log in and take their time to complete the various videos and exercises as time allows. Cathy Carothers of Every Mother, Inc, the creator of the curriculum, provided trainings in 2023 and is featured in the self-study trainings. **Continuing education credits are available for all levels.**

Trainings for Levels 3 and 4 will be held virtually. Registration information and training dates may be found on the [WIC Lactation Continuing Education](#) page.

- Level 1- Self-Study
- Level 2- Self-Study
- Level 3- Self- Study
- Level 4- Self-Study
- See the [WIC Lactation Continuing Education](#) for more information and other offering.

For answers to commonly asked questions about the curriculum: Read through the [USDA Breastfeeding Curriculum Q and A](#).

Feedback received

Many staff have had the opportunity to complete one or more levels of the new WIC Breastfeeding Curriculum. Below is some of the feedback we have received from staff that have completed the level 1 and 2 self-study trainings.

Self-Study Level 1

- “With the information that I have learned from these lessons, I will be able to provide better support for breastfeeding parents and better education to those who are interested in breastfeeding.”
- “I found tips on probing questions to be valuable. Using open ended questions and digging deeper and asking why to get to the root of the problems was most valuable to me.”
- “I thought the role-playing video of a CPA following the 3-step counseling process vs. not was incredibly valuable to see it play out vs. only reading about the process.”

Self-Study Level 2

- “I found a lot of the content mentioned in this learning experience to be very valuable, especially the guidance regarding moms who are suffering from low milk supply and moms who are separated from their babies. I can see myself using this information during my visits with WIC participants to best help support them in their breastfeeding journey.”

- “I found this course quite helpful. Not only did I learn some practical things about breastfeeding, but I also feel I gained some skills and ideas for counseling around the topic of breastfeeding.”
- “I found this education to be very beneficial and valuable in my work as a WIC Nutrition Educator. This education provided information on many different breastfeeding complications or concerns that may come up with families, and the best way to help support families when these arise.”

Self-Study Level 3

- “Information was clear and concise. Also, very detailed. It covered a range of scenarios that we could see at WIC.”
- “Easy to understand; Clear and concise information; Organized well in that the knowledge built on each previous section.”
- “The content was very informative and helpful. A strength is that it was easy to follow, and each module was a nice length of time.”

Self-Study Level 4

- “Offers online, mom/baby real life video examples, lots of repetition of key ideas.”
- “I think in-person trainings are always the most effective, however the on-line training was very useful in completing the training within a busy WIC schedule. The videos and pictures are very helpful.”
- “The strengths include a thorough presentation covering medications, contraindications with breastfeeding, compromised infants, case examples, care plans and breastfeeding devices.”

Have additional questions about the WIC Breastfeeding Curriculum?

For Coordinators, CPAs, and Support Staff contact: Rosie.Pierce-Martin@state.mn.us.

For Peer Coordinators and Counselors contact: Carrie.Klun@state.mn.us.

Additional staff resources

[Breastfeeding Policy and Guidance](#) (USDA)

[Breastfeeding Promotion](#) Module (MDH WIC)

[Breastfeeding 101](#) (USDA WIC Breastfeeding Support)

References- complete listing of hyperlinks:

WIC's Promotion and Support of Breastfeeding

(<https://s3.amazonaws.com/aws.upl/nwica.org/wics-promotion-and-support-of-breastfeeding.pdf>)

Every Mother, Inc (<https://www.everymother.org/>)

Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) Learning Center

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/about/tools/learningcenter.html>)

WIC Lactation Continuing Education

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/bf/conted.html#NaN>)

USDA Breastfeeding Curriculum Q and A

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/bf/curriculum.html>)

Breastfeeding Policy and Guidance

(https://wicworks.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/document/WIC-Breastfeeding-Policy-and-Guidance_1.pdf)

Breastfeeding Promotion

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/training/nutrition/nst/bfpromotion.pdf>)

Breastfeeding 101 (<https://wicbreastfeeding.fns.usda.gov/breastfeeding-101>)

Minnesota Department of Health - WIC Program, 625 Robert St N, PO BOX 64975, ST PAUL MN 55164-0975; 1-800-657-3942, health.wic@state.mn.us, www.health.state.mn.us; to obtain this information in a different format, call: 1-800-657-3942.

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