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Libraries and Librarians Supporting Nursing Families

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This month is the 13th annual [National Breastfeeding Month](https://www.usbreastfeeding.org/national-breastfeeding-month.html)

(<https://www.usbreastfeeding.org/national-breastfeeding-month.html>)! The campaign helps celebrate the many and varying reasons why this act is so important while focusing the conversation on the babies and families in our communities. Librarians can be crucial in creating a welcoming environment of awareness and support for mothers and lactating parents.

Our culture can be hostile toward nursing in public, causing new parents to prefer bottle feeding with formula rather than feel naked and exposed while nursing outside the home. When parents do not feel they can feed their babies wherever they are, the result is often that they abandon breastfeeding.

Libraries are essential community resources for families – inviting parents to join their children in activities and providing information on pregnancy, birth, and child-rearing. Because libraries are spaces where children and adults learn together, librarians can play an important role in the promotion and protection of breastfeeding/chestfeeding. Providing resources that model the normalcy and naturalness of nursing not only helps support parents, but also helps to grow the next generation of nursing families.

How Can Librarians Help?

The stigmas and obstacles that surround nursing cannot be changed overnight, but librarians can make inroads into changing peoples' attitudes – both old and young. Making nursing parents feel welcome in the library is a great start, but the best route to lasting change is by helping children see nursing as a normal and routine activity. Parents cannot advocate for nursing alone; community support from librarians, daycare providers, educators, and neighborhood businesses is essential to actively promote and protect it.

Here are some reasons why it is so important to introduce breastfeeding nursing to children early:

- Many children do not see breastfeeding/chestfeeding at home or in the places they go, so they simply have no idea what it is or that it even exists.
- Children, like the rest of us, are exposed to relentless media messaging that treat breasts as sexual objects.
- Stigmas stem from lack of education. 67.8% of college-aged participants in a [study published by The Journal of School Nursing](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/10598405070230050601) (https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/10598405070230050601) found nursing in public breastfeeding to be unacceptable. Not surprisingly, only 11.3% of those same college-age participants received information about breastfeeding nursing in middle school.

Research shows that children who learn about the importance and normalcy of nursing from their teachers and librarians are more likely to breastfeed/chestfeed themselves when they are older and/or support friends and acquaintances who are nursing.

For young children in particular, one of the best ways to normalize nursing is by talking about mother-child relationships in the animal kingdom. As the author of four mammal books that explore the special connection between mothers and babies, I believe that our very place in the biological world is based on the mammary gland, from which our class – *mammalia* – is derived. Feeding our young through our milk connects us to our mammal cousins.

Books

Here are some books that librarians can make available to help kids learn about nursing as a biological, evolutionary behavior that helps the young grow and develop on their path to maturity.

- *What Does Baby Want?* by Tupera Tupera
- *Babies Nurse / Así se alimentan los bebés* by Phoebe Fox
- *Cuddled and Carried / Consentido y cargado* by Dia L. Michels (also available in bilingual editions with Haitian Creole, Bengali, and Washoe)
- *This Is How I Grow (and Así crezco)* by Dia L. Michels
- *Look What I See! Where Can I Be? With My Animal Friends / ¡Mira lo que veo! ¿Dónde crees que estoy? Con mis amigos los animales* by Dia L. Michels
- *Ziora's Quest: Mommy's Milk Rocks!* by Amaka Nnamani
- *Mama's Milk/Mama Me Alimenta* by Michael Elsohn Ross
- *We Like To Nurse* by Chia Martin
- *We Like to Nurse Too* by Mary Young
- *If My Mom Were a Platypus (and Si mi mamá fuera un ornitorrinco)* by Dia L. Michels



More learning activities can be found on this [Resources](#)

(<https://www.platypusmedia.com/breastfeeding-resources>) page. What titles would you recommend?

Today's guest contributor is **Dia L. Michels**. A resident of Washington, DC, she is the author of over a dozen books for adults and children. Though her topics range from early science education to politics of women's health, her first love are the animal family books. She is particularly honored that her books are being increasingly adopted by programs that serve families in need. If you have any questions or would like to learn more about what you can do to promote and protect breastfeeding, feel free to reach out: DiaLorenMichels@gmail.com (mailto:DiaLorenMichels@gmail.com).

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