

## Breastfeeding Support Group – Parent's Journeys

Todmorden's Children Centre runs a breastfeeding support group, every Thursday 10-11.30am. The group is open to any mother breastfeeding, pregnant ladies who have questions, relatives etc. The group is so friendly and every mum makes the next feel welcome and friendships are soon made. Sometimes it is just lovely to be with other mothers, feeling the same emotions you are, experiencing the same fears and needing to be told everything is ok and if it is not ok, we will make sure we help you on the path to make things ok. Peer support has the potential power to give hidden strength and to help every mother be as capable as they possibly can be. As *Kirsty Ratcliffe*, mother of baby Jenny explains,

*"The breastfeeding group offers a friendly, supportive and relaxed environment where I was able to access impartial advice from very knowledgeable staff about a whole host of issues around breastfeeding. Invaluable support!"*

A Breastfeeding peer Supporter is able to offer mother-to-mother support, encouragement, information, and to promote a better understanding of breastfeeding. Babies who are breastfed for longer periods have higher intelligence, fewer infections, fewer dental problems, reduced mortality and are less likely to be overweight or diabetic in later life. For mothers, breastfeeding protects against breast and ovarian cancer and diabetes. This is powerful information that mothers will want to know when making a decision about how to feed their child and enabling mothers to make a good informed choice. With 8 out of 10 mothers being reported to stop breastfeeding before they had wanted to, support has never been needed more. Many mothers who attend the group say they would not have continued breastfeeding if it wasn't for the support of the group, as this mother of a 2 ½ year old, *Vicky* explains;

*"I enjoy the group very much; it has given me the strength and knowledge to breastfeed and to continue to breastfeed my 2½ year old. It has helped me to normalise breastfeeding an older child. I am sure I would not be breastfeeding still if it wasn't for the group, I am so thankful."*

No mother should feel pressurised around feeding her baby, the group helps provide non-judgemental information and support so that a woman can genuinely choose how she wants to feed her baby, and is able to follow on that choice.

The group also provides advice and support to mothers who wanted to return to work and continue to breastfeed. Information can be given about the laws on returning to work, emotional support for the mother and practical advice and support for the mother regarding expressing breast milk etc. As mother of a nine month old, *Lisa*, explained;

*"I was dreading returning to work, but the advice from the group really encouraged me as they explained how I could still continue to breastfeed, I didn't think I would be able to! I'm thrilled as I wanted to continue to feed and was devastated at the thought I had to stop. My daughter is 9 months old, I work part time and I'm continuing to breastfeed, I'm thrilled."*

A mother of an 8 month old baby girl said;

*"The group gave me support when I didn't know where else to turn. The group always welcomed me with open arms; it was a group I looked forward to going to"*

The breastfeeding support group is very compassionate and non-discriminatory, open to all. The group is wonderfully set up for babies and their older siblings, lots of toys and activities, not to mention the delicious healthy snacks! There is no need to be alone. Mothers are able to learn and share without judgment, gain strength, friendship and hope.