

HORIZONS

A Newsletter for La Leche League Leader Applicants
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How Much Technical Knowledge Do Leaders Really Need?

Adapted from an article by Sue Fineman

One of my more frustrating experiences as an LLL Leader was trying to help a mother who called me with an unusual breastfeeding problem. I found myself up against the wall when a multitude of setbacks occurred to the mother: inverted nipples (that resembled navels, not nipples), nipple confusion in the baby, and a family move within two weeks. You may be asking, “Is there anything she is leaving out?” As a newly accredited Leader, I tried to share all the information and encouragement at my fingertips, but I felt I could do so little to encourage a positive breastfeeding outcome.

Several sessions at a Conference helped to overcome my feelings of inadequacy. I saw slides of unusual breastfeeding situations: cracked and bleeding nipples, breast abscess, inverted nipples, breast reduction and augmentation, and even one slide of a mom with no nipples! (Yes, she had plenty of milk and a beautifully growing baby to prove it.) But just as important was the realization that I KNEW what caused many of these difficult situations. I had lots of information, but I needed something more to help a mother through the more complicated situations. The light turned on in my brain when I heard, “It took time to progress this far. It will take time for the problem to be solved.” This was what helped me realize that there are situations that need the tincture of time.

We are surrounded by expectations of instant answers to major complications, but there is no continuous instant miracle

machine at our disposal! The current emphasis on the new technical solutions or reliance on specialization of all aspects of personal health care can undermine our self-confidence. For many people, more initials after a name translate into more reliability and credibility. The old LLL standby of mother-to-mother support, nursing early and often, and letting the baby finish the first breast first seem too simplistic.

Even though we may feel buffeted by every wind of social change, the real art of breastfeeding is practical lactation management. It forms the basis of the LLL Leader’s toolbox, and a lack of understanding of basic breastfeeding management is the reason for most calls. As Leaders, we are experts in the normal course of breastfeeding throughout the first year of life. We are familiar with issues such as milk supply, nursing early and often, and following the baby’s feeding cues. When the mother of a slow-gaining, premature, or cleft-lip baby calls, you will refer her to her healthcare provider for medical information. You can also make sure the mother understands the basics of good breastfeeding management to build and maintain an adequate milk supply. This is a sign of our team effort to ensure the health of the family.

Greater familiarity with breastfeeding management techniques builds confidence. Other tools we use are: empathetic listening, problem-solving skills, asking for help from LLL support people, and knowing when to suggest other resources to the mother. The more mothers we help through the years, the more we hone our basic skills. How much

we add to that basic knowledge is up to us individually; keeping current on the basics is essential. Almost all breastfeeding situations can be handled in a practical way if the mother is willing. A Leader who is ready to pursue the resources LLL provides can meet 95% of the needs in any calls she receives. Self-confidence develops as we perfect our mother-to-mother skills, expand our resources and learn to trust our instincts.



Visiting Another Group

Adapted from an article by Carol Arena

At some time during your leadership preparation, you might look for an opportunity to visit another Group. If there is no other Group located near you, maybe there's one near Grandma's house or near your favorite place to shop. Consider some of the advantages of visiting another Group:

- Observe other Leader styles. You'll see that Leader variety is the "spice" of LLL. It helps to see the rainbow of different backgrounds, lifestyles and personalities among Leaders.
- Pick up a new technique or meeting idea. Perhaps your Leader uses round robin discussion. You may have the opportunity to observe techniques such as the conversation-style format.
- Experience differences in Group size. A large Group functions differently from a small Group.
- Experience different meeting locations: homes and different types of public places.
- Observe various meeting and Group management formats. How are Group jobs, invitations to membership, library

use, refreshments, welcoming new mothers, introductions and announcements handled? Take the ideas you like back to your Group.

- Observe co-leading arrangements. How are responsibilities shared? How does a lone Leader manage?
- See how Leaders handle challenges to communication. How are toddler noise, side conversations or an overly talkative mother handled?
- Observe Leaders with and without children. How does a Leader with children meet their needs while leading? How does a Leader without a babe in arms reflect LLL?
- Experience that new mother feeling. Attending another Group meeting helps you remember how a new mother needs to feel welcomed and accepted.
- Meet new Leaders, Applicants and Group members. It's a great opportunity to broaden your circle of LLL friends.



New Breastfeeding Resource Guide

The *Breastfeeding Resource Guide (BRG)* has just been updated and revised, and is available online at lli.org/docs/lad/BRGRevisionSep09.rtf

If you are already working with the earlier (2005) version of the *BRG*, you can either continue using that version or switch to the new one. If you haven't yet started the *BRG*, please use the new version.

The *BRG* aims to provide you with basic information and references so that you will be ready to help mothers cope with common breastfeeding concerns. It also directs you to relevant resources to support mothers facing specific breastfeeding challenges.



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