



Lactivism Questions and Answers

If you'd like to call a local business to ask about their breastfeeding policy, but need somewhere to start, you may find this Q&A collection helpful.

Questions you may want to ask:

- Can you tell me what your company's policy is regarding mothers breastfeeding their children?
- If someone complained about a breastfeeding mother, what action would be taken?
- (In response to any blanket reference) And if she chose not to cover with a blanket?
- (Anytime I speak to a manager who says something about moms needing to be discreet, I ask this:) Whose definition of discreet?
- Are you aware that state law protects a mother's right to breastfeed in public? (Have text of law on hand to quote if requested.)
- What would disrespectful breastfeeding look like?
- Do you have policies in place regarding "respectful" behavior by patrons other than nursing mothers?
- What training does your staff receive on your policy and about existing laws regarding breastfeeding?
- Would you consider posting the international breastfeeding symbol to show that you support breastfeeding in your establishment?
- May I share this conversation with others interested in breastfeeding rights?

Questions you may receive:

Why are you calling?

I'm calling to find out what your company's policy is regarding mothers breastfeeding while patronizing your establishment. I'd like to request that your organization's policies support a child's right to breastfeed in public, and that your staff be trained on those policies and applicable breastfeeding laws.

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Protecting, Promoting, & Supporting
Breastfeeding as the Cultural Norm

What happened to start this whole thing?

On Sunday, February 8, 2009, a mother visiting a Denny's restaurant in Asheville, NC was asked to cover herself or leave the restaurant while breastfeeding her child. When she quoted NC law and continued to breastfeed, the police were called and she was threatened with arrest. The incident inspired breastfeeding advocates nationwide to call and email Denny's to inquire about their official breastfeeding policy, and to urge Denny's to welcome and support breastfeeding children and mothers.

What is FirstRight?

<http://firstright.org>

FirstRight is a national grassroots breastfeeding advocacy group committed to ensuring freedom from discrimination for breastfeeding children and their mothers. FirstRight has been taking action in accordance with the organization's established mission and protocol for resolving instances of breastfeeding discrimination.

What is wrong with asking a mother to cover up?

(short answer)

It implies that the mother and baby are engaging in a shameful or distasteful act when, in fact, the baby is simply eating.

Why can't a breastfeeding mother just cover up with a blanket?

(longer answer)

- It's unnecessary. Breastfeeding is a natural, healthy part of parenting. It is nothing to be ashamed of, and need not be covered up. The only definition of "discreet" that matters is that of the mother herself; mothers shouldn't feel they need to hide themselves or their babies while the baby eats nature's perfect baby food.
- It's impractical. Many babies (and all the adults I know!) won't tolerate a blanket over their heads while they eat. The baby tugging and pulling the blanket off actually draws more attention to the nursing pair. Plus, it's inconvenient to add one more thing to lug around in the diaper bag.
- It's hot! Even in an air conditioned room, having the baby's head under a blanket is hot for mom and baby.
- It's dangerous. Re-breathing the air under a blanket can be dangerous for a baby. Recommendations to reduce the risk of SIDS include making sure your baby's head stays uncovered during sleep.

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What laws are in place?

(Have a copy of your local law available, or of a law you'd like your state to consider implementing. You might suggest something like Maryland's law – "A mother may breast-feed her child in any public or private location in which the mother and child are authorized to be. A person may not restrict or limit the right of a mother to breast-feed her child." -- but with an enforcement provision.)

So if this law is already in place, what's the problem?

Though our state does have a law protecting mothers' right to breastfeed, it doesn't include any enforcement provision to detail penalties for violating the law. We'd like to see breastfeeding mothers included in civil rights protections.

Why can't the mother just bring a bottle?

Breastfeeding is a complex biological relationship that can be severely disrupted by bottle-feeding.

Why can't the mother just nurse at home before she leaves?

Babies often eat on an irregular schedule and it is important to a successful breastfeeding relationship that the baby is able to eat on demand.

What about the right of others to NOT see someone nurse in public, especially while eating?

If breastfeeding offends someone, they may ignore it, turn away, ask to be moved, or leave. A nursing mother and baby are not responsible for another person's comfort level. Nor is it a nursing mother's responsibility to support and perpetuate others' prejudices against a normal, natural act.

What is the big deal?

Many mothers are afraid to breastfeed in public because of lack of societal support. The problem is big enough that it keeps many moms from breastfeeding at all or causes them to end their breastfeeding relationship before the minimum one-year guideline suggested by the AAP.

Why is this even an issue?

It is discrimination. Breastfeeding children and mothers are singled out when they are approached to cover, move, or be more discreet and can be made to feel that they are doing something shameful or inappropriate.

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Have you ever personally experienced resistance to breastfeeding?

[Feel free to share your own stories, or say something more general like:]

Many people I've encountered are either supportive of breastfeeding or indifferent. But almost every breastfeeding mother I know has been subject to glares, disapproving looks, snide comments, or outright hostility. Public disapproval undermines a mother's confidence in her ability to breastfeed, which the medical community affirms is the best way to feed a baby.

Are there really that many mothers breastfeeding in public?

Yes. People don't realize how often children are breastfed in public because mothers (and babies!) are so skilled at it that it often doesn't even register with viewers.

How should store managers respond if people do complain?

Managers could respond to a complaining customer by saying, "I'm so sorry you're uncomfortable. However, that mother is within her rights to breastfeed in public. I would be happy to move you to another table if you'd prefer."

Soundbites:

- Breastfeeding mothers have nothing to hide.
- Breastfeeding is a normal, natural, healthy part of parenting.
- Breastfeeding is nothing to be ashamed of, and need not be covered up.
- The only definition of "discreet" that should matter is that of the mother herself.
- Mothers shouldn't feel they need to hide themselves or their babies while the baby eats nature's perfect baby food.
- I don't eat under a blanket, and I don't expect my children to do so either.
- Medical professionals all tell us breastfeeding is best for babies, but mothers still encounter significant cultural resistance to nursing in public.
- Breastfeeding is what breasts are for.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends breastfeeding for *at least* the first year and the World Health Organization recommends *at least* two years.
- We're working towards peaceful, respectful treatment of mothers and babies.
- It's not about my right to breastfeed. It's about my child's right to eat.

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