

Breastfeeding: A Cultural Perspective

**Understanding a Mother's Breastfeeding
Worldview
And Providing Culturally Sensitive
Support**

A Role-Play

By

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For

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**“The Cultural Art of Breastfeeding”
by Cynthia Good Mojab, MS**

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Understanding a Mother's Breastfeeding Worldview and Providing Culturally Sensitive Support

A Role Play

Introduction to the Role-Play

The purpose of this role-play is to increase awareness of the influence of cultural and personal meaning on a mother's view of breastfeeding and upon her choices and decisions related to infant care and feeding.

A Breastfeeding Scenario

Either choose a scenario experienced by the presenters or one that is familiar to members of the audience.

The following is an example that could also be used to explore the cultural dimensions of breastfeeding and to practice supportive interventions. Using a scenario characteristic of some of the families you meet in your community brings out the influences to which the audience can relate.

“Tony, Maria and Baby Emily”

Tony and Maria live in a big new home about 50 minutes from their families. Tony is a member of a large Italian family who has long awaited this grandchild. Maria is the only child of a small British family. Maria is on maternity leave as a researcher in the Biology Department at UBC. Tony is a lawyer in a big firm in Vancouver. They have been married 5 years and after a few years of fertility assessment and counseling delivered a baby girl of 38 weeks gestation weighing 5 ½ pounds by caesarean.

Tony and Maria read widely and attended prenatal classes. They decide to breastfeed and Baby Emily went to the breast for a few minutes at birth. She showed signs of respiratory distress and was then taken to SCN where she stayed for 24 hours. She was given IV glucose and formula by bottle. The first breast feeding opportunities were interrupted by visitors and Emily was not eager to latch or stay latched. At 4 days old Emily was discharged following 2 successful feedings. Maria was pumping q3h. Emily has lost 8% of her birth weight and required follow-up.

Role Play

- Ask for volunteers to play the roles of Maria, Tony and the PHN.
- Provide: a baby doll (nicely dressed), a breast pump, bottle with 10 mls. of milk, formula preparation materials and a can of powdered formula, a portable phone, a calendar and a daily planner.

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Setting

The public health nurse comes for the visit. As she enters the home, Maria is sitting in the chair having just finished pumping. She greets you with a tearful smile and 10 mls. of EBM. Tony is on the phone and following directions for the mixing of formula.

Tony

“I have to go mom. The public health nurse is here. We aren’t starving Emily; I’m mixing up the formula now. Can you hold off on a visit? I’ll get back to you.”

Maria

“That’s Tony’s mom. She bottle fed her babies and said they slept through the night. She thinks we are starving this child and to get sensible.”

PHN

“So this has been a rough night for you all.”

Maria

“You can say that again. I have been pumping every 3 hours and getting only 10-12 mls. Emily has been crying a lot. Sometimes she takes 10-15 mls of formula after I give her my milk and sometimes she goes to sleep only to be crying in an hour. I’ve tried to put her to the breast first, but, no way! She starts to latch then comes off crying. I’ve written it all down.”

Tony

“We have been up and down all night. We just think she is drifting off to sleep so we put her in her crib, close her door quietly and sneak back into bed. We no sooner get there and we hear her crying again. Maybe she was discharged too soon. I’ll make a doctor’s appointment.”

Maria

You’ve got to weigh her. I bet she has lost more weight. How much more can she lose? How much milk should she be getting? How much will I make? When will it be enough? How long is it going to be before she catches up???”

Tony

“When do you think we’ll be finished here? I have to call Maria’s dad back. Her mom and dad want to visit when Maria finishes feeding and pumping. They have a gift for Emily.”

Maria

“Dad has started a portfolio at his bank for Emily’s Education Fund. He wants to go over the options with Tony before he finalizes it.”

PHN

“Well perhaps you could get Emily and let’s have a look at her and see if we can get her to latch.” (Consults a diary of Emily’s activities...lots of entries!)

(Maria gets the baby and awkwardly tries to feed her. Emily is beautifully dressed.)

Tony

“We have done all this preparation but boy it sure isn’t as easy as we thought it would be. My sister called this morning. She has 3 little ones and says babies are like this. You can forget about getting anything done. They take charge and you gradually get used to it. She reminded me that mom and dad told us this when we were young. Now we know what they were talking about!”

PHN

“I can see we need to get you comfortable and to get Baby Emily positioned a little better. As well, we need to ensure a better latch.”

“We have a Breastfeeding Clinic tomorrow. Would you and Tony be able to bring Emily tomorrow and we could work on this. Other parents learning to do this will also be there.”

Maria (looking at her calendar)

“Just a minute, I have to look at my calendar. Tony will have to get his planner.”

Tony (looking at his calendar)

“I have to go into work tomorrow for a few hours and I hope to fit in my squash game at noon.”

Maria

“Welt, I am free, nothing at all in the morning. We are interviewing nannies tomorrow afternoon and we have the Christening rehearsal in the evening.”

Presenters: Stop here

Using Mojab’s Article, distributed for pre-reading and the overhead transparencies, “The Dimensions of Culture”, “The Cultural Dimensions of Breastfeeding” and components of “The Mother’s Worldview”:

- Identify data from the scenario which facilitate understanding of this family’s breastfeeding experience.

Using the assessment questions from Mojab’s article and the overhead transparency “Discovering the Worldview of a Breastfeeding Mother”:

- Discuss additional data which could be gathered to increase understanding of this family’s perspective.

If the group is larger than 4-6 in number, split into smaller groups to do this and then report back. (Refer them to the relevant overheads.)

Referring to the overhead “Providing Culturally Sensitive Support”:

- Provide the groups with copies of the scenario and have them provide examples of helpful responses you could make as the caregiver in this situation.
- Give the group a “flip chart page” or a blank “overhead” transparency and ask them to write out at least one example of each intervention (or, each small group prepares responses for one of the interventions).
- Replay the scenario a few times, asking different members of the audience to be the PHN and to use the interventions outlined on their chart of the transparency. (You can draw names out of a hat or you can ask for volunteers). After each run-through, stop and discuss the helping interventions and compare with alternatives provided by other group members.

Using the overheads summarize:

- Dimensions of Culture
- Cultural Dimensions of Breastfeeding
- Components of a “Worldview”
- Helping Interventions for Providing Culturally Sensitive Support

Give each participant a bookmark

GUIDELINES FOR PRESENTER RESPONSES TO GROUP WORK

Data from the Scenario Reflecting the Mother's Worldview

Tony and Emily are well educated, independent and have finances for a nanny
 They live separately from their families but see them and are influenced by them
 Tony's mom implies they are starving Emily
 Bottle feeding prevents starving Emily and promotes sleeping through the night
 Maria kept a meticulous diary of Emily's behavior
 Maria expecting Emily's eating to be more predictable
 Pumping is not providing much milk despite frequency
 Emily not latching or sucking
 Maria and Tony are tired
 Expected Emily to sleep longer
 Emily in own room, in crib
 Worry about leaving hospital too soon
 Many questions re: weight loss, amount/feeding, amount/pumping, etc.
 Expecting there are "black and white" answers
 First day home, yet both have things scheduled which represent life before baby
 Maria's parents not wanting to present during feeding or pumping
 Maria's parents preparing for Emily's future
 Maria's dad wanting to talk financial affairs over with Tony
 Believed they prepared well (reading and prenatal) shouldn't be overwhelmed
 Tony's sister/family sees infants/children as taking charge
 Have to fit in time for Breastfeeding Clinic
 Maria sees self as "free" if nothing in her calendar

Relationship to Cultural Dimensions of Breastfeeding and Maria's Worldview

If see baby as "taking charge" may indicate the baby is innately "out to get them".
 Placing baby in crib and own room, separating themselves from her except for feeding.
 May convey a belief that the infant is a separate individual and needs to learn to be on her own. They probably value uniqueness and independence. **(Infant's Nature)**

Mom's focus on schedule and feeding amounts reveal probable belief in the need to control the process of breastfeeding versus being in harmony with her body and her baby. They value the scientific, methodical approach to problems and trust experts in related fields. Tony has made a doctor's appointment to address the concerns that developed overnight. They also see the relationship with Emily will include a nanny who will likely feed her as well as Maria. **(Mother-Infant Relationship and Relationship With Breastfeeding)**

Parents focus on "time" reveals looking at the future. When will things be predictable, when can we fit things to a schedule like they are accustomed to doing? Grandparents are looking at Emily's future. **(Timing of Breastfeeding)**

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Breastfeeding is not seen as doing anything. Maria sees her schedule as free because there are no appointments. Dad needs to get to his work and play. **(The Activity of Breastfeeding).**

Tony and Maria appear to have a typical “American Breastfeeding Worldview” Spend a few minutes hearing group members response to this “typical worldview” as described by Mojab. Do they believe this is true in their experience?

Additional Data Which Could Be Gathered Using the Questions About the Breastfeeding Worldview

Encourage group members to connect what they saw and heard with what answers they may anticipate to the questions.

Providing Culturally Sensitive Support

The following are examples of possible responses:

Validating will help Maria and Tony vent emotions and feel understood.

“Things are not going as you had planned.”

“You are worried that Baby Emily will lose more weight.”

“You are worried that you left the hospital too soon.”

Normalizing will help Emily and Tony to feel less anxious and not alone in their fears.

“Newborns don’t have predictable feeding and Emily is no exception.”

“It takes time for a mom’s milk supply to be established and time for babies to learn to feed.”

Respecting Cultural Distress by recognizing that Maria and Tony are used to being prepared for things and accustomed to meeting expectations and following schedules.

“Your efforts towards a schedule for Emily may come together better if you put her to the breast every 2 hours.”

Addressing Overriding Beliefs

“On one hand, breastfeeding theory tells you to follow the baby’s cues and to feed frequently. On the other hand doctors and nurses ask you to keep a feeding and elimination diary and to have Emily’s weight monitored.”

“Your background in science probably is a major factor in your decisions to breastfeed but Tony’s mother’s comment about starving Emily and your concern about Emily’s crying and weight makes you wonder about your decision.”

“I can share some good research articles which demonstrate the positive effects of frequent infant sucking on establishing a good milk supply.”

Creating Community

If Maria and Tony interact with other new parents who are breastfeeding, they will find support.

“I think you’ll find help and support at the Breastfeeding Clinic. There are many parents facing the care of a new baby and with many of the same questions you have about feeding.”

“I’ll give you the phone number of the local La Leche League leader who will be an experienced breastfeeding mother and a resource for you. This leader will also schedule meetings of breastfeeding mothers who share experiences with one another and have the leader and her resources to draw upon.”

Accommodating Coping Style

Tony and Maria are educated parents with an “individualistic” worldview and there is a need to respect their autonomy and rights to making their own decisions.

“If you can share your goals about breastfeeding Emily, I’ll try to provide any resources I can to help you meet them. You and Tony will know what is best for Emily and for yourselves.”

Letting Go

It may be difficult to watch Tony and Maria make their own decisions but understanding their backgrounds and their goals will guide the support and information you give. Their cultural and personal perspectives are to be respected and if they feel this, they are more likely to seek help in the future.

“BREASTFEEDING: A CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE”

OVERHEADS FOR PRESENTATION

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DIMENSIONS OF CULTURE

Beliefs About Human Nature

Beliefs About Social Relationship

Beliefs About Relationship With Nature

Beliefs About Time

Beliefs About Human Activity

CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF BREASTFEEDING

Understanding a Mother's Beliefs About The:

Infant's Nature

The Mother-Infant Relationship

The Mother's Relationship with Breastfeeding

The Timing of Breastfeeding

The Activity of Breastfeeding

A MOTHER'S WORLDVIEW

How Is It Developed?

Where Does It Come From?

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Ethnicity

Race

Religion

Expectations

Norms

Roles

Attitudes

Values

Beliefs

DISCOVERING THE WORLDVIEW OF A BREASTFEEDING MOTHER

Listen to the Responses to the Following Questions

- **What have you heard about breastfeeding?**
- **What have you heard about infants?**
- **How are you feeling about your baby?**
- **How are you feeling about your baby's breastfeeding pattern?**
- **How are you feeling about breastfeeding?**
- **How are you feeling about the breastfeeding help and information?**

PROVIDING CULTURALLY SENSITIVE SUPPORT

Validating

Normalizing

Respecting Cultural Distress

Addressing Overriding Beliefs

Creating Community

Accommodating Coping Style

Letting Go

Evaluation Form

Provide a blank piece of paper and ask group members to complete the following sentence and circle the number which best describes what you have learned from this presentation.

By participating in this role play I have...

By participating in this presentation I have...

Comments/Suggestions

On scale of 1-10 where 1 is nothing and 10 is a great deal, circle the number which best describes how much you have learned from this presentation.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Nothing A Great Deal

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