

Breastfeeding is a Relationship: Breastfeeding the Right-Brained Way

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How exactly do you use a right-brained approach to breastfeed your baby? First, take some deep breaths and let go of those worries about doing things “wrong.” Instead of thinking of breastfeeding as a skill you need to master, or a measure of your worth as a mother, think about breastfeeding as primarily a relationship. As you spend time with your baby, you’ll be more adept at reading her cues. As you hold her, your baby will be more comfortable seeking your breast. Breastfeeding will flow naturally out of your affectionate relationship. Based on her extensive clinical experience with mothers and babies, pediatrician and board-certified lactation consultant Dr. Christina Smillie has developed some strategies that can help you help your baby. Here are some specific things you can do.

Start with a calm, alert baby. One mistake that many women make is to wait to try breastfeeding until their babies are either sound asleep or screaming. Think about yourself. Do you learn best when you are asleep or upset? Probably not. The other reason to start with a calm baby has to do with physics. When a baby is screaming, her tongue is on the roof of her mouth. You will never get your breast in her mouth when her tongue is like that.

Watch for early feeding cues. These cues include turning her head when someone touches her cheek and hand-to-mouth. Take note of when she starts smacking her lips or putting her hands to her mouth. This is an ideal time to try breastfeeding.

Use your body to calm your baby. One way to calm a crying baby is by placing your baby skin to skin vertically between your breasts. Your chest is a very calming place for your baby. Try talking and making eye contact. All of these activities can get her to calm down, allowing your baby to seek the breast on her own.

Follow your baby’s lead. When a calm, alert baby is held vertically between her mother’s breasts, often she will begin showing instinctive breast-seeking behaviors, bobbing her head and moving it from side to side. Once your baby starts these behaviors, help her in her efforts. Following your baby’s lead, support her head and shoulders. Move her rump toward your opposite breast. Encourage her explorations with your voice.

Play while you learn to breastfeed. Play is something that is largely absent from the mothers we see. It all seems so serious and they are terrified of doing something wrong. If you are feeling frustrated, we’d like to encourage you to look at this another way. Focus on your relationship with your baby and consider breastfeeding as a part of the larger whole. Breastfeeding will flow naturally out of your affectionate relationship.

In summary, if your baby is healthy, she is wired to know how to breastfeed. It all doesn’t depend on you getting everything right. Relax and just focus on getting to know your baby. The rest will follow.

Excerpted from: Mohrbacher, N., & Kendall-Tackett, K.A. (2005). *Breastfeeding made simple: Seven natural laws for nursing mothers*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.

Available at ibreastfeeding.com.