

COMPETENCE FRAMEWORK FOR BREASTFEEDING SUPPORT

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Health Service Executive



ALCI Association of Lactation
Consultants in Ireland

Prepared for the Association of Lactation Consultants Ireland by the School of Nursing and Midwifery, The University of Dublin, Trinity College Dublin. Framework developed in conjunction with the Education and Training Subgroup of the National Breastfeeding Strategy Implementation Committee.

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FOREWORD

I welcome the publication of the Competence Framework for Breastfeeding Support, developed by the University of Dublin, Trinity College Dublin for the HSE and the Association of Lactation Consultants in Ireland. This work was undertaken in conjunction with the Education and Training Subgroup of the National Breastfeeding Strategy Implementation Committee.

It is important that we have skilled, competent staff to support Irish mothers to breastfeed. This framework will enable managers to ensure that their teams have the knowledge and skills to provide the highest standards of breastfeeding support in healthcare settings. The framework provides healthcare workers with a list of core competencies at Awareness, Generalist and Specialist level and will enable individual healthcare workers to engage in self assessment and peer review.

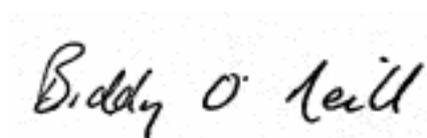
The Health and Wellbeing Division plays an important role in implementing Healthy Ireland, a Framework for Improved Health and Well-being 2013-2025 which seeks to improve the health and well-being of the population by

- increasing the proportion of the population that are healthy at all stages of life,
- reducing health inequalities,
- protecting the public from threats to their health and well-being, and
- helping to create an environment where every individual and sector of society can play their part in achieving a healthy Ireland.

The promotion, support and protection of breastfeeding is a priority for the Irish healthcare system. Good health starts with breastfeeding. Improving our breastfeeding rates will contribute to improvements in child and maternal health, and reductions in childhood obesity and chronic diseases.

Breastfeeding training and continued education of health professionals is associated with improved breastfeeding outcomes. Training and professional development for health service providers is a key element of our efforts to enhance breastfeeding rates and provide skilled support to mothers.

I would like to thank the team at Trinity College Dublin, Meabh-Anne McNamara, President of the Association of Lactation Consultants in Ireland and the Education and Training Subgroup for their work and valued contribution to this project.



Ms. Biddy O'Neill,
Interim Assistant National Director Health Promotion and Improvement, HSE
Chair of the National Breastfeeding Strategy Implementation Committee

RECOMMENDATIONS ARISING FROM THE FRAMEWORK

Recommendations for implementation of the framework have been formulated by National Breastfeeding Strategic Implementation Committee, Education and Training Sub-committee. It is recommended that:

- The Department of Health, through the Maternity Strategy Committee, consider the Competence Framework for Breastfeeding Support when outlining service provision and developing workforce planning within the new Maternity Strategy for Ireland.
- Service managers become aware of the value of this competence framework and use it with staff towards ensuring safe, competent and efficient provision of services related to breastfeeding support, and achieving goals of the Healthy Ireland strategy. Orientation on the Competence Framework for Breastfeeding Support should be provided to managers in both hospital and community settings.
- A review is undertaken of how current pre-service training meets the Competence Framework for Breastfeeding Support, and identifying any gaps that may exist in providing competent breastfeeding support. This will assist service providers to recruit staff with the required competencies to provide high quality, safe and reliable healthcare, in accordance with the Health Information and Quality Authority's Standards for Safer Better Healthcare (June 2012).
- There is investment in training to ensure effective skills for relevant health workers and consistency of information across all health care disciplines involved with pregnant women, infants and their mothers. Training of trainers and allocation of time and resources for clinical practice workshops are recommended to enable health workers to achieve the competence in breastfeeding assistance and support laid out in this framework.
- The development of further efficient and effective tools and methods to assess staff knowledge and skills and gaps based on the degree of breastfeeding competence required for the different levels their work may require, ie; awareness level, generalist level, and specialist level. Once these gaps are identified new curricula need to be developed for the different disciplines who provide supports to service users. It is recommended the curricula be incorporated into continuing education programmes.

It is recommended that The Competence Framework for Breastfeeding Support be reviewed in 2 years taking into account experiences of service providers, front line staff and managers, and training providers in using this Competence Framework for Breastfeeding Support. At the review stage it is recommended that an audit of service users be carried out to ascertain their experience of breastfeeding support from service providers.

INTRODUCTION

The Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding (WHO, 2003) emphasises that women need education and support from knowledgeable health workers, in order to establish and maintain breastfeeding. However, evidence-based knowledge, skills, and attitudes are lacking among health workers in many disciplines and settings (Renfrew *et al* 2012). It is recognised that training and continued education are associated with improved breastfeeding outcomes for clients (Thulier and Mercer 2009), meaning that methods to assess competency of health workers related to breastfeeding, are required. The National Breastfeeding Strategy Action Plan (Department of Health & Children, 2005) set an objective to ensure that ‘Health workers have the knowledge and skills necessary to protect, promote and support breastfeeding’ (Objective 2.2, pg 35). A study was undertaken by the Education & Training sub-committee and their report recommended that further work was undertaken to establish the expected standards/competencies of the various levels of health workers related to assisting breastfeeding towards providing appropriate education and training for all the levels (Becker, Mumford, Cahill, 2010) and a means of measuring this important objective.

The purpose of this project was to develop a competency framework for health workers in the hospital and community settings who provide support and care to pregnant women, babies and their mothers who are breastfeeding. The framework is intended to list core competences in breastfeeding assistance and protection whilst recognising that competences for individual health disciplines may also exist through other regulatory and educational mechanisms. It is envisioned that the framework will benchmark expected work practices, assist in workforce planning and skill mix, inform academic curricula and professional development programs, and so will enhance the care of breastfeeding children and their mothers and promote inter-professional collaboration.

The framework for competencies in supporting breastfeeding was commissioned by ALCI (The association of Lactation Consultants in Ireland) and developed in consultation with the Education and Training subgroup of the National Breastfeeding Strategy Implementation Committee.

COMPETENCE IN SUPPORTING BREASTFEEDING

Competence is a complex concept and debates continue about the most appropriate definition and method of assessment (Pearson et al, 2002). In broad terms, competency frameworks recommend expected levels of knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviours that are required to undertake work activities (Gander 2006). They support the development of health workers by identifying the extent of knowledge and skill required for that level of practitioner. This framework recognises that to deliver effective support and care, health workers must be competent to provide such services. In addition, it is essential that some health workers expand their area of competence to enhance care by developing the breadth and depth of their knowledge, and their skill and expertise in supporting breastfeeding children and their mothers.

Education and training are important to prepare healthcare workers to provide safe and effective support and care to breastfeeding children and their mothers, irrespective of setting. Education for practice must ensure that health workers are competent to practice at a level appropriate to their own scope of practice and job description. This framework will prompt the health worker to consider their own needs and requirements for education based on assessment of their own needs and level of competency, as well as to inform service managers of expected competencies and training needs.

COMPETENCE FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT

Supporting breastfeeding as the biological norm and respecting women's decisions are core principles of competency for every healthcare worker providing support to the breastfeeding mother.

Pregnant women, infants and young children and their mothers come into contact with a wide range of health workers in hospital and community health settings. Health workers are the generic group of people who work in health services at any level, whether professionally qualified, as paid employees or independent contractors or volunteers, whose main activities are aimed at enhancing health. They include the people who provide health services such as doctors, nurses, midwives, pharmacists, laboratory technicians and management and support workers such as financial officers, cooks, drivers and cleaners.

Table 1 lays out three broad levels of competence used in this framework: awareness, generalist, and specialist based on international practice.

The level of competence required by each individual health worker should be determined by the health worker and their manager based on the level of competence required for their role. The self-assessment of achievement of the competencies should be undertaken in consultation with peers, breastfeeding women and any regulatory or managerial structures that are relevant to the individual.

Table 1: Guidance on competency levels required by individuals

Awareness level competencies	Aimed at Health care workers who, although not engaged full time in care of the breastfeeding mother, have had some orientation in supporting breastfeeding children and their mothers. Basic factual knowledge underpins the care and support offered. They may carry out clinical, technical, scientific or administrative duties according to established protocols or procedures, or systems of work.
Generalist Competencies:	Generalist competencies are aimed at those healthcare professionals who are actively engaged in providing regular care and support to breastfeeding mothers. They have factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within their field of work. These Individuals are involved in direct care of breastfeeding children and their mothers who have routine information and assistance needs and sometimes more challenging needs around breastfeeding. Consequently, they require a greater degree of knowledge and skills competence.
Specialist Competencies:	Aimed at health care professionals who provide in depth care and support with breastfeeding challenges, are a resource to other health care workers and develop the capacity of the healthcare team in relation to breastfeeding. This includes breastfeeding specialists with an IBCLC qualification who may have a dedicated breastfeeding role.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR SELF-ASSESSMENT OF COMPETENCE IN SUPPORTING AND PROTECTING BREASTFEEDING

- The framework is designed to be used as a self-assessment, but may also facilitate health workers to engage in peer review activities with colleagues, supervisors or managers.
- The health worker should be deemed competent at the appropriate level for all items required within their role in supporting breastfeeding.
- The health worker should provide supplementary evidence to support their level of competence. This may take many forms which could include; reflective practice, educational attainment, case studies, quality assurance activities or peer review.
- Health workers who determine that they require a general level competency in an item must also be competent in the awareness level.
- Health workers who determine that they require a specialist level competency in an item must also be competent in the awareness and general level competencies.
- For the purposes of this document Scope of Practice refers to the area or areas of a health workers profession where they have the knowledge, skills and experience to practise safely and effectively.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Baby Friendly Health Initiative in Ireland (BFHI): a global campaign by the World Health Organisation and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) which recognises that implementing best practice in the maternity service is crucial to the success of programmes to promote breastfeeding. www.babyfriendly.ie

Breastfeeding: Action of feeding at the breast.

Breastmilk Substitute: any food being marketed or otherwise presented as a partial or total replacement for breast milk, whether or not suitable for that purpose.

Competency: the combination of training, skills, experience and knowledge that a person has including their ability to apply them to perform a task safely.

Exclusive breastfeeding: infant receives only breast milk. No other liquids or solids are given – not even water – with the exception of oral rehydration solution, or drops/syrups of vitamins, minerals or medicines.

Health workers: Medical, midwifery, nursing, other professional and non-professional staff including voluntary or unpaid workers, who provide care for pregnant women, infants and their mothers, attending the hospital or community services.

International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk substitutes: The World Health Assembly adopted the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes in 1981 to protect and promote breastfeeding, through the provision of adequate information on appropriate infant feeding and the regulation of the marketing of breastmilk substitutes, bottles and teats.

Mother: pregnant woman or woman having given birth and now breastfeeding

Scope of Practice: The areas - roles, functions, responsibilities and activities – of a healthcare worker in which they are educated, competent and have the authority to perform.

COMPETENCE ASSESSMENT TOOL

AWARENESS LEVEL COMPETENCIES

Criterion	Assessment cues	Support/Evidence of competency	Date
Knowledge	<p>Recognises their role in protecting and supporting breastfeeding</p>	<p>Can list two ways in which breastfeeding is important to child and 2 for mother and 2 for wider community</p> <p>Can list 2 ways they can protect and support breastfeeding within the activities of their role</p> <p>Knows the policy related to breastfeeding protection and support in their workplace</p>	

- Demonstrates an understanding of practices that support the mother to breastfeed
 - Can state practices that support bf such as of skin to skin, early initiation of breastfeeding, rooming-in and feeding in response to child's needs
 - Can identify some of the practices that may be harmful to breastfeeding e.g. separation, supplementation for non-medically indicated purposes
- Provides information that is appropriate to the breastfeeding mother and baby
 - Can identify a suitable health professional to refer the breastfeeding mother to
 - Can supply details of reputable sources of information to the breastfeeding mother e.g. supplies appropriate documentation and leaflets or provides written details of a local breastfeeding support service

- Recognises the role of breastfeeding in the infant older than six months

Has knowledge of the value of breastfeeding as the child adds complementary foods to their diet (close to six months of age)

Can list practices and attitudes that support the mother to continue breastfeeding up to two years and beyond

Skills

- Supports the mother with Positioning and attachment

Has an awareness of the importance of a good (deep) latch and effective feeding

Can refer to the most appropriate health care worker and support service to assist with positioning and attachment

- Supporting the mother to express breastmilk

When working in a clinical role, can choose the appropriate practices and treatments that facilitate the continuation of breastfeeding

Recognises that hand expression is appropriate for mothers in certain clinical situations and has knowledge of the situations when using a breast pump may be appropriate

Can refer appropriately to the most suitable breastfeeding support person to assist the mother with milk expression

Behaviours

- Works collaboratively with other health workers to support the needs of the breastfeeding child and their mother

Recognises own level of competency and refers appropriately

- Supports national and international activities to protect and support breastfeeding

Supports the principles of the Baby Friendly Health Initiative

Abides by the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk substitutes and its subsequent resolutions in their practice

Attitudes

- Recognises that breastfeeding is the biological norm for mothers and infants

While recognising that breastfeeding is the biological norm for infants, respects the right of a woman to make an informed decision about their infant feeding method and be supported to carry out this decision

- Uses basic knowledge and skills to provide safe, competent, kind, compassionate and respectful care

Can reflect on own thoughts and feelings about infant feeding in order to facilitate support

**GENERALIST COMPETENCIES:
(in addition to awareness competencies)**

Criterion	Assessment cues	Support/Evidence of competency	Date
<p>Knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognises that breastfeeding is the biological norm. 	<p>Demonstrates knowledge of the importance of breastfeeding and risks of not breastfeeding for mother and baby and wider community</p> <p>Skilfully applies theoretical knowledge to support each breastfeeding woman and her infant to attain their breastfeeding goals</p> <p>Demonstrates knowledge of the important role of exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months and thereafter as part of a wider diet until two years of age or beyond</p>		

Describes ways in which cultural beliefs, societal influences and community practices affect breastfeeding in the local community

- Demonstrates understanding of the practices that support the mother to breastfeed

Demonstrates up to date knowledge of the anatomy and physiology of human lactation and applies this to their practice

Outlines normal infant sucking and swallowing

Can explain practices that support or hinder effective establishment of breastfeeding including providing information, antenatal discussion, labour and birth practices, early initiation of breastfeeding, skin to skin and keeping baby and mother together

Recognises normal feeding patterns and recognises the need for unrestricted feeding in response to the child's needs

Identifies signs of adequate intake and output to meet the infant's nutritional needs

Identifies acceptable medical reasons for supplementing breastfed babies and has an awareness of the hierarchy of supplements

Recognises that non medically indicated supplementation may have an adverse impact on the success and duration of breastfeeding

Can assess needs and provide anticipatory guidance to mother/parents related to breastfeeding

Employs and/or teaches parents, techniques for soothing baby other than using a pacifier

- Practices in accordance with local, national guidance and legislative frameworks

Understands and appropriately applies the local and national policies that support women to breastfeed

Practises in accordance with legislation, national guidance and is responsible and accountable within their own scope of practice framework

- Provides information that is appropriate to the breastfeeding mother and baby

Provides the breastfeeding mother with accurate sources of information, as appropriate to the social, cultural and healthcare setting (antenatally, in hospital at/after giving birth or at home, as appropriate to educational, social and cultural needs)

		<p>Demonstrates appropriate judgment on when to refer to other health care workers in order to assess, treat and manage breastfeeding issues outside one's own scope of practice, and be able to collaborate with them</p> <p>Uses theories and techniques to build breastfeeding confidence in mothers, families and in colleagues</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognises the role of breastfeeding in the infant older than six months 	<p>Applies knowledge of the role of breastfeeding in complementary feeding up to 2 years of age and beyond</p> <p>Supports the mother and child to continue breastfeeding up to two years and beyond</p>
Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applies knowledge to assist breastfeeding 	<p>Assists the mother to acquire skills to position and latch the infant to the breast for effective feeding.</p>

Takes a history and assesses developmental skills, feeding and
Recognises the signs of effective milk transfer and of breast condition

Employs practices that support effective establishment of breastfeeding

- Assists the mother and child experiencing breastfeeding challenges

Can identify and take appropriate actions in potential breastfeeding challenges such as:

- Milk production (low and overproduction)
- Milk transfer (ineffective latch, infrequent feeding, nipple variations)
- Infant situations including prematurity, multiple births, hospitalisation, hypoglycaemia, hyperbilirubinemia, inappropriate weight gain

- Maternal situations including sore breasts, sore nipples, common skin conditions (thrush, dermatitis) medication use and tests/treatments, hospitalisation, acute and chronic illness, obesity, physical disability, substance abuse, mental health, mood disorders

- Assists with milk expression/pumping and storage

Can supervise/guide the mother in acquiring the skills of hand expression

Can guide the mother is learning safe and effective use of a breast pump

Has knowledge of non-biased information for a range of pumps and correct use of pumps

Assists the mother to select the most appropriate method of expression based on her own individual situation

Has knowledge of the most appropriate cleaning and hygiene techniques related to expressing breastmilk

Has knowledge of safe storage of breastmilk

Has knowledge of value and how to access donor bank human milk

Assists the mother to develop skills and a process of equipment cleaning and safe storage of milk

- Assists in use of expressed milk

Instructs mother/parents in techniques of using cup, spoon, finger feeding

Instructs mother/parents in techniques of paced bottle feeding

Can provide information to the mother who is interested in donating her milk to the milk bank

Behaviours

- Works collaboratively with other practitioners to support the needs of the breastfeeding child and their mother

Recognises own level of competency and refers appropriately

Practices within own limitations and consistent with scope of practice and organisational policies

Demonstrates an understanding of the child and woman's right to receive safe and high quality healthcare including breastfeeding care and ensures that care delivered reflects evidence-based practice applicable to the child and woman's own unique set of circumstances

- Practices to support exclusive breastfeeding

Works to promote breastfeeding through education of other healthcare personnel

Can discuss with mothers how to maintain lactation if the mother is separated from her baby

Demonstrates appropriate judgment when recommending that infant supplementation is required

- Practices in an ethical and evidenced based manner

Abides by the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk substitutes and its subsequent resolutions in their practice

Demonstrates ability to find, critically review and use evidence based information sources

Explains and debates theories and techniques to build breastfeeding confidence and skills in mothers, families and in colleagues

Attitudes

- Practices is underpinned by knowledge and respect for breastfeeding as the biological norm

While recognising that breastfeeding is the biological norm for infants, respects the rights of women to receive assistance and support in their infant feeding method

- Uses comprehensive knowledge and skills to provide safe, competent, kind, compassionate and respectful care

Skilfully reflects on own thoughts and feelings about infant feeding in order to facilitate information sharing with women and practice, in an ethical and non-judgemental manner

SPECIALIST COMPETENCIES:
(in addition to awareness and generalist competencies)

Criterion	Assessment cues	Support/Evidence of competency	Date
Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognises that breastfeeding is the biological norm 	<p>Demonstrates and shares knowledge of the importance of breastfeeding for mother and baby and wider community</p> <p>Provides education to women, families, health professionals and the community about breastfeeding and human lactation</p>	

Has an extensive knowledge of policies at global, national, and local levels which protect, promote and support breastfeeding or breastmilk intake in all situations

Has knowledge of local and national trends in breastfeeding incidence, duration, barriers and supports.

Describes in detail normal maternal anatomy and physiology and variations and how these impact on breastfeeding

Describes in detail infant and young child anatomy, physiology, structural and functional factors and their impact on breastfeeding, growth and development

Explains in detail the immunological and biochemical importance of human milk

Explains in detail the effect of lactation (or of not breastfeeding) on maternal health, nutrition, fertility, psychological status

- Critique research findings from medical and social sciences and evaluate their applicability to breastfeeding issues

Recognise methodological research issues related to human milk/breastfeeding, critically review and interpret research, and provide consultation for the general level health worker

Provides specialist input in discussions on the feeding/provision of human milk for infants with illness or uncommon situations

Provides specialist input in discussions on the facilitation of breastfeeding for women with illness or uncommon situations

- Demonstrates an understanding of the practices that support the mother to breastfeed

Advocates for breastfeeding children and their families

Can explain how therapeutic techniques of other health workers could be used with breastfeeding challenges

- Provides information that is appropriate to the breastfeeding mother and baby

Develops sources of information and methods of communication so as to serve as a resource for health care colleagues

Demonstrates appropriate judgment on when to refer to other health care professionals in order to assess, treat and manage breastfeeding issues outside one's own scope of practice, and collaborates care with them

Identify accurate sources of information on complementary health care practices, examine how these practices might relate to breastfeeding

- Recognises the role of breastfeeding in the infant older than six months

Provides information regarding introduction to appropriate family foods and the role of breastfeeding when complementary feeding

Skills

- Applies knowledge to assist breastfeeding

Provide leadership in the development of policies and protocols and care plans related to lactation and breastfeeding

Provide leadership in the development, implementation and evaluation of programmes which support and promote breastfeeding

Provides education and training to other health workers

Assists in assessment of competency and discussion of ways to fill gaps

- Supports the mother and infant experiencing breastfeeding challenges

Assesses feeding ability and challenges beyond the level of a generalist, including those related to maternal anatomy and physiology, medication needs, infant oral anatomy, swallowing and digestion, persistent slow growth and neurological responses and reflexes

Assess the mother or child with complex medical needs and can develop a plan for facilitative and compensatory strategies to support breastfeeding

Working as part of a multi-disciplinary team, provide anticipatory guidance and develop a plan for establishing milk supply with a pregnant woman expecting an infant requiring immediate major surgery or intensive neonatal care

Develops and implement care protocols that facilitate breastfeeding for the high risk mother-child dyad

- Supports the mother to express breastmilk using a breast pump or use aids or devices

Critiques and evaluates indications, contraindications and use of techniques, appliances and devices which support breastfeeding

Appraises and critiques how techniques devices used to ensure initiation and/or continuation of breastfeeding

Instructs other health workers in appropriate indications, assessment and use of specialist techniques, appliances and devices

Provides evidence-informed, unbiased information to the mother regarding the use of specialist techniques and devices

Behaviours

- Works collaboratively with other practitioners to support the needs of the breastfeeding child and their mother

Works collaboratively with the health care team and other health care workers to provide coordinated breastfeeding services

Makes appropriate referrals to other health care providers and community support resources

Delegates appropriately to meet the needs of breastfeeding mothers and their children

Provides follow-up services as required

Participates or leads in activities to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of care offered

Attitudes

- Practices is underpinned by knowledge and respect for breastfeeding as the biological norm

Engages in education, research and sharing activities that promote and support breastfeeding as the biological norm

- Uses comprehensive knowledge and skills to provide safe, competent, kind, compassionate and respectful care

Skilfully reflects on the quality and effectiveness of care offered in order to meet the needs of breastfeeding women and families

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