GIFS

The Global Initiative for Father Support

THE GOLDEN BOW

is a symbol for the "Gold Standard", that is the ideal, of exclusive and continued breastfeeding. One loop represents the mother and the other represents the child. The knot symbolises the father, family and society which support them. One of the ends is for timely complementary food after six months, the other is for the use of family planning to space births three to five years apart. The Golden Bow is a joint outreach initiative of UNICEF and WABA.

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Father Support in Breastfeeding:

Parents undoubtedly feeling a great deal of pride, joy and delight at the birth of baby. There can also be some fear, insecurity and feelings of being overwhelmed. Don't worry, these feelings are perfectly normal. A new baby is a lot of responsibility, now and for the next couple of decades! Soon you will be feeling like a pro and very comfortable with your new role.

Everyone seems to talk about breastfeeding mothers and most pictures of breastfeeding show mothers and babies together. But, what about the father? Is there really such a thing as a "breastfeeding father" and can he be included in the breastfeeding experience? If a mother decides to breastfeed is the father an important member of the breastfeeding team? Many experienced fathers will answer with a resounding "Yes". But a new dad might think that his role in breastfeeding is a minor one. Not so! Studies show that the attitude of the baby's father is the most important factor in whether or not a mother begins and continues to breastfeed.

A mother most often makes the decision to breastfeed early in her pregnancy and that the father's attitude toward the infant's breastfeeding is pivotal and greatly influences her decision.

Although fathers cannot breastfeed baby, he plays a key role in the success of breastfeeding his baby. Fathers are very important to all babies, no matter how they are fed. Many people feel that a supportive father or other close family member is one of the most important factors in a satisfying breastfeeding experience. Some even go as far as referring to the breastfeeding triad (mother, baby, and father) instead of a nursing dyad. A father's support and encouragement can help make the early learning period of breastfeeding easier and more enjoyable for mother and baby.

Both parents have a lot to offer their children, and the differences between mothers and fathers are just as important as their similarities. Each parent can develop their own relationship with their child and do it in their own way. Feeding isn't the only way to bond with a baby; there are many different ways. The differences are what

a child will come to expect and treasure from his parents. Let your unique parenting style be a part of your child's life and you will have a relationship to cherish.

The father of a breastfeeding baby is an important part to the breastfeeding relationship. In ancient times, the men would go hunt while the women would stay close to camp tending children and gathering plants. Obviously this does not suit our active lifestyles today, but in essence much is the same. It is imperative for the baby to have his mother close at hand. The breastfeeding relationship is based on supply and demand. This means that the mother needs to be close by her baby so that she can allow her baby to nurse as much as possible.

The father's role in this relationship is very important. The father of the baby can help to create a situation where mother and baby can be together. Many fathers fear that they won't be able to bond with the baby without feeding bottles. This is very far from the truth. Bonding doesn't occur through the ingestion of food through plastic. Bonding occurs through a physically, loving relationship.

New babies crave human contact. They enjoy being close enough to hear a heartbeat, feel skin, smell their parents, hear the sound of their voices and experience the ongoing motion and activity of the human body. And why not? They have just emerged from a world where they were surrounded by all of these sensations. While mother can provide all of these through breastfeeding, dad can provide them in so many terrific ways.

There are many ways for a father to connect to his new infant. First-time fathers, especially, need to be encouraged to hold their newborns, because they are often hesitant to hold the tiny babies. Bringing the baby to the mother to breastfeed is a great way to demonstrate to the baby that the father can, in fact, meet his baby's needs. His baby will be well aware of the fact that daddy is the transportation to the food.

Dads also teach their babies that there is more to love than food, and that there is a world outside of Mommy. Forging your own relationship

with your baby will enrich both your lives—and Mom's, too. Find your own way to have fun with the baby. Walk baby around in a soft carrier, or be the one to introduce squeaky toys and rattles. And remember, new babies love to nap on Dad's warm chest. Changing diapers, bathing, holding, carrying in a sling, singing, touching, massaging and just loving the baby are all ways that a father can bond with his baby. These are all crucial ways that a new father can develop a loving, trustful relationship with his child.

Dads can use themselves as human shields to give their wives privacy while they nurse in public. A new mother is just as scared as the father is of doing the wrong thing. Confidence comes with spending time with that baby? and with practice.

While there is a lot written about the benefits of breastfeeding for mothers and babies, are there any benefits for fathers? Many experienced breastfeeding fathers (as well as mothers) find they can get more sleep at night. The ease and convenience of breastfeeding means that baby can be fed right away, without having to cry as long, and everyone can go back to sleep sooner.

Since supporting a family in today's economy can seem overwhelming, the cost savings of breastfeeding are also a good benefit for fathers as well as mothers. A family's income can stretch that much further if there is no formula to buy, and breastfed babies generally have fewer health problems, resulting in lower health care costs. Many feel they can't afford not to breastfeed. Also a healthier baby is a happier baby, and there may be fewer long nights of staying up with a sick or cranky baby.

The support of a baby's father can help the breastfeeding relationship succeed. The father can head off discouragement, deflect negative comments from friends and relatives, help calm a fussy baby and bring the mother food and drink while she is breastfeeding. Most importantly the baby's father can remind the new mother that breastfeeding is one of the most important things she can do to get their baby off to a good start in life.

The father's support is critical, especially in a mother that is breastfeeding for the first time. The Dad is the person who is with her the most and knows her the best. If he is enthusiastic, knowledgeable and supportive, it makes all the difference in the world as to whether or not breastfeeding will be successful and enjoyable for that Mom and baby. Especially in the first few weeks, when lack of sleep and hormonal changes can sometimes make new mothers waver in their determination to breastfeed, a father who suggests, "let's try that one more time," or who reminds his partner that, "they say babies space out their feedings after the three week growth spurt," can be invaluable.

"Breastfeeding is enhanced and the nursing couple sustained by the loving support, help, and companionship of the baby's father. A father's unique relationship with his baby is an important element in the child's development from early infancy."

Fathers Are Important in So Many Ways!

Provide plenty of encouragement and reassurance to the new mother; she will tend to feel more confident in her feeding choice. Sometimes the first few weeks of breastfeeding can be challenging. Continue to coach her after delivery. With your help and support she will conquer any problems she may encounter.

Do your reading and learn about the benefits of breastfeeding for both your baby and your partner. It takes two people to remember all the information that you are trying to learn in these early days. You can support the new mother most effectively if you are really convinced that breastfeeding is best for your baby. But, even if you are not completely convinced, you should appreciate the fact that she really wants to breastfeed. Show your loving support by helping her in whatever ways you can.

Don't underestimate your importance. Sometimes dads feel left out in the early weeks. The attention is heaped on your new baby and your partner. You may feel that your role is unimportant. It will be difficult for your partner to succeed at breastfeeding for very long without your ongoing help and support.

Things That Father Can Do With His Baby

Conscientious fathers want to be close to their children, and you may wonder how breastfeeding affects your relationship with your child. In fact, you may think that breastfeeding makes bonding with your child harder for you. After all, television and magazine ads show happy dads giving bottles of formula to their babies. Giving food is portrayed as a way of showing love and acceptance.

Although breastfeeding is a unique way that a mother bonds with her child, feeding a baby is not the only way to bond. Both mothers and fathers interact with their babies in other ways to build a loving relationship. You are limited only by your imagination. The following list describes how fathers can show loving care for their babies. Babies like these activities and you will both to get to know and enjoy each other.

- Hold or rock your baby. Babies are very tactile and are born with a sense of smell. If you hold them, they'll get to know you.
- Have skin-to-skin contact with your baby. Babies have very soft skin and love to feel the skin of others.
- Neck nuzzle your baby and sing and hum. In a sitting or reclining position, place the baby's head in the crook of your neck and support the body with your hands. Sing, rumble and hum. Dad's deeper voice is often very soothing.
- Bath or shower the baby. At first some babies do not like bath time but most come to enjoy it. It's a great bonding time.
- Bring the baby to your wife for night feedings. This is a way to show both of them that you care.
- Stroke the baby while she is nursing. Sit next to your wife and gently stroke the baby. You all are sharing the feeding.
- After nursing, being burped and falling asleep on daddy's shoulder or chest shows the baby that daddy is a place for comfort too.
- Hold your baby while your partner takes a shower, naps or eats a warm meal.

- Give your baby a tour. Show the baby the inside of cabinets, walk through all the rooms or go for a short walk in the neighborhood.
- Massage your baby. Baby massage is a lost art in our culture but is practiced in many places throughout the world.
- Change diapers. Some of the best playtimes are during diaper changes.
- Make funny faces. Hold baby about ten inches from your face and entertain him.
- Dance with baby. Hold your baby, put on some music and dance. Children of all ages love this.
- Relax on the floor with baby. As baby becomes more mobile, Dad is a great piece of exercise equipment.
- Play with your baby. Dangle toys, tell stories and entertain him.
- Talk to your baby. As your baby gets to know your voice, he will learn that you are special too.

The more this happens, the more confident you'll feel about your own abilities as a parent. As you get to know your baby, you'll think of even more ways to interact. Remember, the best way a father shows his love is to be there for his child. Sharing the care of your child and being a presence in his life gives him a great start.

Things You Can Do to Help Your Partner

- Make sure your partner is comfortable while breastfeeding. Be sure she has any needed accessories close at hand such as pillows, a foot stool or something to drink.
- Check the baby's positioning and latch-on during breastfeeding. Mom may not be able to see how the baby is positioned or latched on from her angle. Offer to adjust her pillows or make the position more comfortable.
- Make sure your partner gets the sleep she needs throughout the night and encourage her to nap every day. She needs a great deal of rest after childbirth to recover her strength and to feel energized.
- Offer to go to the store and run errands. This can be a big help to a new mom, as well as an experienced one!

- Spend time with your older children so your partner can spend time with your baby, sleep, etc.
- Warm food is always a treat and very satisfying. Make sure there are quick nutritious snacks easily available for your partner.
- Make sure mom has help. Encourage her to accept help from you, family members, neighbors or housekeepers.
- Protect your partner's privacy. Unwanted visitors and other intrusions to her privacy can put a strain on a new mother. Act as a buffer to others who may make unsupportive or inappropriate comments about breastfeeding. If you show a positive attitude, they will take their cue from you and follow your lead.
- Establish good lines of communication. The ability to share thoughts and feelings is the cornerstone of a close relationship. During this time of adjustment and changing roles, sharing and talking about feelings (both good and bad) is essential.
  Communication between mothers and fathers is important. Each needs the moral support of the other during the adjustment to this major change in their lives. It is a good idea to set priorities after discussing what things are really important. After deciding upon the priorities, the parents can discuss strategies for attaining them, including what each is willing and able to do toward the goal.
- It is very important for mom to have some free time without the baby. It is a good idea to have some pumped milk in the freezer and refrigerator just in case your gone longer then you expected and dad needs to feed.
- If and when mother returns to work, she may become discouraged with the stress of schedules and fatigue as well as from being away from baby. Father can help by giving extra encouragement and reminding her of the gifts she is giving baby by breastfeeding and to them, as parents, by having a healthy child.
- Be supportive and thoughtful. Father can also lend a hand by taking on more of the household jobs which allows mother times to relax and enjoy nursing and mothering baby.
- Taking care of food and drink are great ways to help new mothers keep their milk supply up. Many new mothers are so busy with their babies that they don't take the time to eat properly and they don't realize that they're not drinking enough to allow their bodies to make adequate supplies of milk. Those same mothers may

have been adamant about eating plenty of fruits and vegetables while they were pregnant. But once the baby arrives, they forget that they're still a key part in their infant's development: the sole supplier of their newborn's food and drink.

- Be patient if your partner seems less interested in sex than in pre-baby days due to hormonal changes.

The current thinking among pediatricians is that women should try to breastfeed for at least a year. Interestingly, studies have shown that the more supportive their partners, the longer women breastfeed and the more confident they feel about their ability to do so.

Each father must choose his own style and level of involvement dependent upon his circumstances and the needs of his family & culture. Parenting is a very hard job but very rewarding.

For New Fathers

The baby has arrived and you feel a little shut out and maybe jealous. This is a normal feeling for new fathers. All the attention and gifts are focused on mom and the baby. When the baby is breastfed, a mother and baby may seem inseparable, leaving the father feeling doubtful about being a part of the new family. It may help if the father realizes that breastfeeding is one of the most valuable gifts a mother can give the baby. Breast milk is superior nutritionally, and promotes the physical and emotional well being of the baby, both now and in the future. Providing support to the breastfeeding mother is of great importance.

To learn about relationships, baby needs his mother as his primary caretaker. The trust he learns allows him to be able to separate from her and develop other relationship later in life. A father is usually the baby's first extended relationship. The baby learns differences in voices and sounds and smell, being cuddled and held and being comforted. This relationship is built when the father takes on some of the baby's care.

Bonding is the result of a continuing interaction between the baby and the parent which forms the relationship. Fathers as well as mother can hold babies face-to-face, talking to and touching them. This

growing attachment helps baby and father to form a close relationship and helps father adjust to his new role.

Resuming Your Sexual Relationship

Breastfeeding is an intense relationship and involves lots of touching; therefore, your partner may have diminished sexual interest. Do not take this personally. Give her time and lots of understanding. Sexual activity should not resume at least until after her six week check up with the obstetrician or midwife. Then, whenever you both feel ready, you may resume your sexual activity.

Perhaps you have read that breastfeeding can work as a method of birth control. While this method is not 100% effective, All of the following conditions should be met before considering relying on breastfeeding as a method of birth control:

Your partner is: Breastfeeding around the clock, and has not yet had a menstrual period, and is less than 6 months post-partum.
Your baby is: Using no pacifiers, and is not receiving any supplemental bottles or infant formula.

If all of the above conditions are not being met, then a barrier method of birth control should be used, such as a condom or diaphragm. Birth control pills (progestin only or mini-pills) may be started after 6 weeks when the breast milk supply is well established. However, if her milk supply decreases, she should discontinue the pills immediately and use barrier methods.

Parenting is One of the Most Rewarding Jobs

You will develop your own style and level of involvement depending upon your circumstances and your personality. Fathers who give love and support to their partners and participate in the care of their baby, enhance the family dynamics. As your baby grows and goes through each new stage, parents find themselves facing new challenges, constantly learning and becoming more than they imagined they could be. Being a parent is often hard work, but most parents will agree that it is a job with the richest of rewards.

Dads Need Support Too!

There are a host of new feelings and responsibilities for new dads. In addition, dads can feel left out of the "inner circle" of mother and baby. It helps to have someone to talk to. Your partner may be your "best friend" and you can share these feelings with her. If you need someone else to talk to, seek out help from **FATHER SUPPORT GROUP** where you will probably get the most understanding and practical advice from someone who has recently been through this life experience. You can also seek out another man whom you trust. Maybe your father, brother, brother-in-law or neighbor.

The advantages of breastfeeding

- Breastfeeding requires no preparation, no heating, no bottles or dishes you have to wash.
- It's free — and formula ain't cheap.
- Breast milk never runs out and you never have to deal with leftovers.
- Breastfeeding is good for your partner, giving her a chance to bond with the baby.
- It's good for your baby. Breast milk contains the perfect blend of nutrients. Breastfed babies have a much lower tendency than formula-fed babies do to develop food allergies and respiratory and gastrointestinal illnesses, and they're less likely to become obese as adults. Breast milk also transmits the mother's immunity to certain diseases.
- Breastfed babies' diapers don't stink. Breastfed babies produce stool that smells almost sweet, especially when compared to the poop produced by formula-fed babies.

Breastfeeding benefits

Infants benefit from breastfeeding because it is easily digested and does not cause allergies. Breastfed babies have a higher IQ, straighter teeth and fewer speech impediments. Breastmilk also protects against cancer and diabetes, ear and respiratory infections. The immune system is stimulated with breastmilk to help protect against disease and give a better response to vaccines. Breastmilk

has a role in protecting against SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome) and more.

Mothers benefit from breastfeeding because it protects against ovarian and premenopausal breast cancer, helps get uterus back to pre-pregnancy size and shape, creates special time for mother - baby bonding, delays ovulation and menstruation, decreases osteoporosis, decreases missed school or work days due to baby's illness, no worries about formula recalls, takes less time (preparing, shopping for and cleaning bottles), and more sleep at night.

Families benefit from breastfeeding because it is more economical, makes babies healthier, and allows families to spend more time together.

The **community** and **earth** benefit from breastfeeding because it is a natural resource that is ecologically sound. There is no plastic, waste or packaging involved. Artificial formula does not contain secretory IgA, lysozymes, macrophages, hormones, enzymes, growth factors, or long chain polyunsaturated fatty acids. In fact, artificial formula is missing hundreds of ingredients compared to human breastmilk.

Importance of Breastfeeding in Islamic Perspective:

Fathers, you are very important to family life. God wills that children grow in wisdom and love in a home with both a mother and father. As a father, you have tremendous influence on a mother's decision to breastfeed and the duration of the nursing relationship. Your support is essential.

God designed fathers to protect, love and support their families-- not to make milk for newborns. If you are a Muslim, you will want to submit yourself to God's will in this matter.

Helpful Resources

There are several good web sites on a father's role in breastfeeding. Run a search on "Fathers and Breastfeeding" and you will come up with several web sites.

Please remember that this is general breastfeeding information only and does not replace the advice of your health care

provider. If you have a problem that you are unable to resolve quickly, seek help immediately.

Key Areas of Action for Father Support Group

- Develop district level networks involving several partners to protect, promote and support district level action, including organizing mother support networks in the community.
- Conduct rapid surveys and bring it to the attention of district administration, health authorities, politicians, partners in the movement and media.
- Organize public awareness events and recognize fathers who successfully supported exclusive breastfeeding, let them share with others how they did it.
- Also recognize women who successfully breastfed exclusively.
- Mobilize support for having local community based childcare arrangements at work sites responding to women's needs.
- Mobilize more and more fathers specially new fathers to join father support group.
- Revitalize Baby Friendly Hospital/Clinic Initiative in your district.
- Establish other community level father support groups in your district.
- Ensure that information on the importance of maternity protection is made available to all women at district level.
- Ensure that workplace support to breastfeeding women in their respective district is provided, including childcare options, breastfeeding breaks, etc.
- Involve community elders, social, religious and political elites, councilors and government officials at district level to strengthen father support group.
- Ensure that International Code for Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and relevant national legislations are effectively implemented at their district level, and that all families, health workers and other stakeholders are aware of their provisions.
- Creating baby friendly communities supportive of mothers.
- Monitoring and organizing campaigns to raise awareness of irresponsible marketing practices of the infant feeding industry.
- Campaigning for toxic free environments through linking with environment and other groups.

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Financial Assistance

WABA

The World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) is a global network of individuals and organisations concerned with the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding worldwide based on the Innocenti Declaration, the len Links for Nurturing the Future and the WHO/UNICEF Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding. Its core partners are International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN), La Leche League International (LLLI), International Location Consultant Association (ILCA) and Wellstart International, Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine (ABM) and LINKAGES. WABA is in consultative status with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC).