Baby feeding is one of the most rewarding and often most challenging aspects of parenting. When feeding goes smoothly it provides pleasure, a sense of fulfilment and closeness. However, feeding difficulties can be painful and deeply distressing.

NCT believes it is important for parents to have every opportunity for positive feeding experiences. Baby feeding is integral to a woman getting to know her newborn and learning how to be a mother. When she feels that feeding is going well she feels good about herself, happy with her baby and their relationship. When she feels anxious, in pain, self-critical or judged by others she feels unhappy, less sure and less confident.

It matters very much that women feel supported and well prepared for the realities of feeding their baby, and parents have strategies to use if they experience doubts or difficulties, or feel they need guidance.

Time to adjust and bond

The early days after birth are unique in their importance: parents and babies are coping with massive changes and adjusting family relationships. Ensuring that mothers and babies are comfortable and that feeding is going well in the first hours, days and weeks is central to everyone’s wellbeing. It is crucial for establishing breastfeeding and is the time when the greatest proportion of women stop breastfeeding with regret due to unresolved difficulties. An ‘adjustment and investment’ period after the birth, to focus on recuperation, relationships and establishing infant feeding, would help to protect the family. NCT encourages families, friends, parents themselves as well as health professionals, service managers and employers, to respect this special time.

NCT seeks to:
- Provide parent-centred information and help that is relevant for all parents
- Promote and protect the conditions that make breastfeeding straightforward
- Facilitate parent to parent support throughout the First 1,000 Days

NCT believes:

1. Parents should be encouraged to make feeding decisions that are right for them and their baby. It is important for parents to feel confident and comfortable with their decisions. Therefore concerns about health issues should be balanced with valuing the developing family relationships and recognition of the impact of social and emotional issues on baby feeding decisions.

2. Fathers and partners need to be informed and involved in pregnancy and the care of their baby. Services should therefore include information and support tailored to fathers’ needs wherever possible.

3. All mothers and fathers need access to practical, evidence-based information, independent of commercial interests, to help them make decisions about feeding their baby. Information about the advantages and practicalities of breastfeeding and formula feeding should be widely available to children and adults of all ages so that feeding issues are well understood throughout society.
4. UK governments and agencies should fully implement the Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding, the International Code and relevant World Health Assembly Resolutions, which promote breastfeeding and protect parents from inappropriate pressure and poor information about baby feeding. Manufacturing companies, health professionals, and voluntary organisations concerned about family health and well-being should ensure the recommendations are upheld in practice.

5. Health professionals, and all those who work with new parents, should provide support by actively listening, giving encouragement and offering practical information and help. Individualised support is needed during pregnancy, at the time of the first feed and throughout the early days, and often influences whether breastfeeding is successfully established. Parents should be able to express any difficulties or concerns about feeding without feeling judged. Health professionals need up-to-date training on all aspects of infant feeding.

6. All those providing maternity and neonatal care or training should implement an externally evaluated, structured programme that protects women’s breastfeeding decisions, based on the best available evidence of effectiveness, using the Baby Friendly Initiative (BFI) as a minimum standard. The recent BFI emphasis on relationship building as well as information on baby feeding is in line with NCT ethos and NCT supports implementation across NHS, community and education services.

7. There should be consistent, evidence-based information available to parents about the introduction of solid foods. For healthy babies born at term, parents are recommended to introduce solids foods at around six months of age, when their baby is ready. Breastfeeding mothers should be supported to continue breastfeeding in addition to introducing solid foods for as long as they want to.

8. Formula milk can be continued throughout the first year. There is no advantage in changing to follow-on milk. Whole milk can be given from 12 months of age. Milks targeted at toddlers and young children much more expensive and are not necessary.

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**NCT College**

All NCT practitioner education includes an understanding of the issues around infant feeding and how to offer non-judgmental, parent-centred and evidence-based information and support.

Education of NCT Breastfeeding Counsellors has a focus on listening skills, baby feeding and reflective practice. They aim to provide the information, skills and resources parents need to increase their confidence in decision-making around infant feeding.

Peer supporters are mothers with experience of breastfeeding who are able to support other local mothers. NCT training enables peer supporters to develop parent-centred listening skills.

Practitioners and often peer supporters work in partnership with health professionals to deliver local services.

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NCT seeks to promote and protect the conditions that make mothers’ decisions to breastfeed more straightforward.

9. As social and cultural attitudes and expectations influence how parents decide to feed their baby, Government departments throughout the UK should work together to promote policies and practice across education, employment, business, legal systems, healthcare, leisure and welfare to encourage a breastfeeding friendly culture. Similarly:

• Employers should have policies in place to enable continued breastfeeding when women return to work, reflecting the Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding. Policies should include flexible working arrangements, on-site crèches where possible, facilities for expressing and storing breastmilk and breastfeeding breaks.

• Information about baby feeding should be included as part of education in schools for children of all ages, to ensure young people grow up aware that breastfeeding is the biological and historical norm.

• The media should play a positive role in shaping attitudes towards baby feeding. Broadcast, internet and printed media referring to baby feeding should show images of breastfeeding and dialogue that demonstrates awareness of the health and social issues, in order to encourage acceptance of, and confidence in, breastfeeding.

10. Breastfeeding makes a major contribution to public health and has the potential to reduce health inequalities. Resources and support should therefore be targeted to parents in areas of disadvantage to:

• establish peer support programmes or other innovations involving and empowering local mothers working in their own community

• provide information in a variety of formats and languages as appropriate.

11. A supportive environment can help parents feed their baby when away from the home; so NCT runs the Breastfeeding Welcome scheme. All services, businesses and facilities should be welcoming to parents and provide positive breastfeeding policies and baby feeding amenities:

• Parents should be able to feed their babies when they are hungry or need to be soothed. It is important that parents feel supported when feeding outside the home, whether they breastfeed or bottle feed.

• Baby feeding facilities should be accessible to all parents, separate from public conveniences. They should be clean with comfortable seating, drinking water, the option of a place to breastfeed in private and facilities to make up formula safely.
12. Health professionals and organisations should not accept sponsorship, advertising revenue, educational grants, equipment or information for parents from manufacturers of infant or follow-on formula, bottles or teats.

NCT supports the International Code on the Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes, subsequent Resolutions and the Nestlé boycott, so no Nestle products, such as Nescafé, should be used at any NCT event. Nestle is the target of an international boycott because it has consistently refused to comply with the Code and Resolutions.

NCT offers a range of services for parents, parents-to-be and health professionals:
- mutual support for parents through an NCT branch network across the UK, local newsletters and opportunities to meet other parents and parents-to-be;
- antenatal courses, led by NCT practitioners, that focus on preparing for labour, birth, baby feeding and life with a new baby;
- support from breastfeeding counsellors, either face-to-face, at local drop-ins or via NCT helpline, as well as peer support from other mothers;
- a one-number helpline that welcomes calls about any aspect of feeding; parents do not need to categorise themselves as ‘breastfeeding’ or ‘not’, or rely on help from commercial organisations
- Early Days, Introduction to Solids and other courses, facilitated by NCT practitioners, covering common issues faced by new parents, including baby feeding, and opportunities to discuss concerns, share experiences and ideas;
- Support for parents and parents-to-be from a range of diverse and socially disadvantaged backgrounds through voluntary work, partnerships with community and other charitable organisations and via the NHS and children's centres.
- Baby Cafés - a network of breastfeeding drop-in centres combining social contact with help from breastfeeding specialists, in community venues. Pregnant and breastfeeding women and their supporters can get one-to-one help from trained staff, talk to each other, build their confidence and view resources.
- education through NCT Professional, for midwives, healthcare practitioners, GPs and commissioners and others.
- parent-centred, evidence-based information on the NCT website, in printed and electronic materials and from NCT Shop, which also offers practical products for parents and babies.

Supporting policies

NCT values and approaches to infant feeding support: a message framework answers NCT workers questions about our role in providing information, services, mutual support and lobbying relating to infant feeding.

Promoting positive experiences: NCT values and infant feeding introduces NCT’s values and infant feeding message framework.

Referenced policy briefings on:
- Breastfeeding
- Formula feeding
- Introducing solid foods
- The WHO Strategy and Code