

Inquiry into breastfeeding

I would like to submit to the inquiry my experiences of combining breastfeeding and work with my two children. My daughter is now 7 and was breastfed until she was 20 months old. My son will be four in July and is still breastfeeding.

I would like to comment specifically on the need to provide encouragement and support to mothers who wish to, or may have to return to work while breastfeeding. It is at this time many mothers feel they have no other choice but to stop breastfeeding and as many mothers are returning to work while their babies are quite young this is having a negative impact on breastfeeding rates and the duration of exclusive breastfeeding.

I was fortunate to have had a positive experience of combining work and breastfeeding with both my children. I was able to take 12 months maternity leave with my first child and did not return to work until she was 11 months old. I was able to go and breastfeed her during my lunchbreak and was able to negotiate part time work.

Things were a bit more challenging when I returned to work after the birth of my son as he was only seven months old. I discovered that the department that I worked for had no policy on breastfeeding and work. I needed to negotiate directly with my supervisor regarding lactation breaks and a suitable place to express. Fortunately there was a separate office where I could express and kitchen facilities nearby. I combined expressing milk for my son with visiting him at crèche for a lunchtime breastfeed. Slowly as he got closer to 12 months I no longer visited him during my lunch breaks and as he naturally reduced his number of breastfeeds my need to express at work eventually ended. Without the cooperation and support of my supervisor I would not have been able to return to work when I did. If I had not been able to negotiate a solution that had enabled me to continue breastfeeding I would not have returned to work at that time as I felt so strongly about the long term health benefits to my son and myself of breastfeeding.

I was lucky to be in a position where I felt comfortable to be able to negotiate an arrangement that enabled me to continue breastfeeding while working. Not all mothers are fortunate to be in this position.

Initiatives such as the Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace Accreditation program run by the Australian Breastfeeding Association need to be supported and promoted by government to ensure that mothers can successfully combine breastfeeding and work.

Many mothers do not know that it is possible to continue breastfeeding when they return to work and accurate information needs to be made available.

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