

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN



I would like to offer my experiences in order to counteract the radical suggestions being made in some submissions (that is, to ban formula feeding in public and to make formula only available on prescription).

I have 2 children - both adults now and I was unable to breastfeed for long with both of them due to a thyroid condition that affected my ability to produce milk. With my daughter, I accepted after 6 weeks that I was not producing milk and changed to formula with rice cereal at age 3 months. No problem. I was not criticised or made to feel guilty about this. She is now 31 years old.

When I had my son (who is now 19 years old) - what a different story. He was a bigger and hungrier baby and cried from day one due to hunger. I never experienced engorgement and, apart from the first few days in hospital, by breasts produced virtually nothing. I was told to continue and that he would suck and encourage the production of the milk. My thyroid condition was totally ignored - as if all scenarios, including medical, could be adapted to facilitate breastfeeding. My son from age 2 weeks scratched me and screamed non-stop during "feeds" - my breasts were totally flat and empty and so floppy I couldn't even get the nipple into his mouth. He was clearly not being nourished. He never slept more than 40 mins from birth until 10 weeks of age. I was beside myself with dangerous fatigue and suffering hallucinations due to lack of sleep. I contacted nurses from The Mothers and Babies Association in a state of panic and desperation frightened that I might hurt my son as he screamed non-stop and I mean NON-STOP. He would then fall asleep out of exhaustion. I was told over and over to continue despite the fact that he was losing weight (I would be told not to worry as long as he didn't lose more than 500 gms a week). He had a hunted gaunt look on his face that I now can see in photos from that time.

I was told repeatedly that anyone can breastfeed (and I really wanted to) - just persevere and not to use top-up feeds as he would be "spoilt" and not want to work for it. This said in the face of a child and mother clearly in distress and both pathologically exhausted.

In the end when he was 6 weeks of age, my husband came home one lunchtime to find me sitting on the floor propped against the wall with my son in my arms both crying - this had been going on for hours. I had nothing in my breasts. My husband had bought 2 bottles, Lactogen formula (the cheapest you can buy as he didn't know what else to buy) and sterilising equipment. HE fed my son who gulped 1.5 bottles down, spurting it out of his mouth in his panic to get it down and then slept for 4 hours. I then rang the Mothers and Babies Association and discussed what had happened and luckily spoke to an older nurse who reassured me that there is more to mothering than just breastfeeding. Music to my ears as I felt like a failure.

My son started solids (rock melon etc.) at 5 months of age as he was again not sleeping and clearly hungry and I continue to formula feed him. He remained a slim build and grew up to be an extremely intelligent, active, healthy and well-adjusted young man of whom I am proud.

I would like now to briefly convey my experiences of formula feeding

- In public, I was openly sneered at by the "breast feeding self-righteous"
- I was hounded by "breast feeding Nazis" that could not understand that I had had no choice
- I was confronted on a daily basis with magazine articles relating the merits of breastfeeding and that formula fed babies got sicker and were less intelligent
- If I mentioned in a group that I had to heat up a bottle, I was bombarded with unwanted advice and such an air of arrogance that it took my breath away
- Only older women (grandmothers) seemed to understand, sympathise and comfort me

I have never written a submission to a parliamentary enquiry before but felt that I had to represent the others in the world - those that for one reason or another just cannot breastfeed. I would ask that:

- No laws be passed banning the open sale of formula or formula feeding in a public place
- It be remembered that mothers who formula feed may have had to do so out of regretful necessity and not out of choice and to refrain from inferring that these mothers are failures or mothers who do not have the welfare of their child at heart.
- Remember that although, it is by far more advantageous to breastfeed, no one has the God-given right to tell another woman how to feed her child. In the end the choice should be hers as there may be factors in her life of which we are unaware.

PLEASE, ABOVE ALL THINGS, BE TOLERANT AND DO NOT JUMP TO CONCLUSIONS. LET US SUPPORT ALL WOMEN IN HOW THEY FEED THEIR CHILD NOT JUST THOSE WHO ARE ABLE TO BREASTFEED.

By the way, I am a health professional of 25 years and have a Master in Public Health so I am not without knowledge in the field of population health.

Kind Regards,

Susanna Psalios