

## ***Feeding baby out and about in the UK? What's the fuss? Shereen Fisher, Chief Executive Officer, Breastfeeding Network***

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**Fact:** Feeding your baby out and about is protected by law.

In Scotland breastfeeding is protected by the [Breastfeeding etc. \(Scotland\) Act 2005](#), which says that it is an offence to stop someone in a public place from feeding their child, if under two, with milk. The legislation allows for fines for preventing breastfeeding in public places.

In England & Wales this protection comes from the [Equality Act 2010 \(EA 10\)](#), which states that it is sex discrimination to treat a woman unfavourably because she is breastfeeding.

**Fact:** Few people know the legal position.

While the law is more explicit in Scotland, does it offer more protection?

We don't yet know as the current EA 10 law has not been tested in court. All cases brought have been settled out of the courts. (Hogan Lovells, 2015)

### **What does this mean for parents breastfeeding out and about in the UK?**

This could mean that although the law is protective, it has little cultural influence at a societal or individual level unless it is better understood and adhered to.

**Fact:** Many women are worried about feeding in public places. They are worried about feeling embarrassed, possible negative reactions from the public and the risk of confrontation.

**Fact:** Communities in the UK are generally not supportive of breastfeeding (Victoria, 2016).

**Fact:** Worries about feeding in public are real for women and form a serious barrier to starting to breastfeed, or can mean a mum stops breastfeeding before she wants to.

Although infrequent, there have been several high profile cases of women being vilified in public for breastfeeding outside the home. The negative treatment of breastfeeding women in the media affects feeding decisions. One mum recently told me that her reason not to breastfeed was that she was worried about feeding in public; she had since questioned herself and felt guilty about her decision. She became less assertive as she reflected on her experience but I was sorry to hear her apologise for something that was not within her control.

Was her choice not to breastfeed based on freedom or the lack of it?

Who is responsible for that? The law? The media? Society? The influence of an industry that repeatedly and blatantly blurs the line between breastmilk and formula?

Many women tell us they worry that if they do decide to breastfeed they will end up isolated from their friends and family because they don't feel welcome to breastfeed their baby when they are out and about.

So, you can understand any woman or concerned relative being worried that she might be treated badly, even though we know that breastfeeding happens all the time and largely goes unnoticed. Most women have a positive experience of breastfeeding, but this isn't seen or shared with others. Only the negative stories make the press. Whether it's just perception or reality, the worry stops breastfeeding happening.

We need to change the conversation about feeding out and about. This doesn't mean pitching individual women against each other or suggesting women are more discreet or, indeed, by asking individual women to speak up alone for breastfeeding.

We collectively need to support communities to understand and value breastfeeding so it can be seen as just a normal thing to do. This is only achieved if we can bring it out of the closet or home

and into the mainstream in an open and celebrated way. This requires conversations with others outside of the present breastfeeding movement.

**We know what works.** It is essential that breastfeeding protection and support is embedded in all maternity care and birthing facilities. This must be accompanied by consistent training of medical professionals.

Using a peer support model, through which women support each other, is a proven way for them to develop skills and confidence to rehearse breastfeeding out and about. This has a positive impact on breastfeeding choice and duration (Hoddinott 2006, Blake Stevenson 2016).

Designating places as breastfeeding-friendly is another way a community can act together to declare support for the value of breastfeeding, with the intention of changing local culture one place at a time. [The Breastfeeding Network](#) has developed a scheme with information for parents, families, businesses and organisations to use. It is simple and accessible and can be used in a variety of contexts: single small businesses, retail parks or even airlines! The information is available for anyone who wants to help make places more breastfeeding-friendly by equipping them with information to help change the conversation around breastfeeding. The BfN scheme helps families feel confident breastfeeding out and about, offers communities and businesses a way to show that they welcome and support breastfeeding, and raises awareness about the benefits of and barriers to breastfeeding.

While some might see schemes like this as controversial or as a necessary evil, many women report positively that breastfeeding friendly schemes helped them cross the threshold from home to out and about and allowed them to see and feel that their community would support their decision to breastfeed their baby.

As one mother put it, seeing a breastfeeding friendly scheme in operation by a coffee shop owner made '*...me feel like I was being held by my community while I was holding my baby...*'.

### Useful resources and references

[The National Breastfeeding Helpline](#) (0300 100 0212), offers independent, confidential, mother-centred, non-judgmental breastfeeding support and information from volunteers with experience who trained by [The Breastfeeding Network](#) and the [Association of Breastfeeding Mothers](#). Lines are open 9.30am – 9.30pm every single day of the year. Calls to the Helpline cost no more than calls to UK numbers starting 01 or 02 and are part of any inclusive minutes that apply to your mobile provider or call package.

Opinion on Breastfeeding Discrimination for Hogan Lovells International 2015

Hoddinott, P, et al (2006), One-to-One or Group-Based Peer Support for Breastfeeding? Women's Perceptions of a Breastfeeding Peer Coaching Intervention, *Birth*, 33: 139–146.

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.0730-7659.2006.00092.x/abstract>

Unicef Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding: <http://www.unicef.org/newsline/tensteps.htm>

Breastfeeding Network: Breastfeeding-Friendly Scheme:

<https://www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/bfn-breastfeeding-friendly-scheme/>

Evaluation of Breastfeeding Network peer support

<https://www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/evaluation/>

Victora, Cesar G. et al (2016), Breastfeeding in the 21st century: epidemiology, mechanisms, and lifelong effect. *The Lancet*, Volume 387, Issue 10017, 475 – 490.

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