

Breastfeeding in the workplace and other employees

[Business](#), [Employee](#)



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Introduction

One aspect of diversity in the workplace is an employee's status as a parent. There are a number of issues surrounding how to balance and promote family life for employees while also focusing on the success of the organization or company. Some of these issues include paid family leave, schedule flexibility, and breastfeeding in the workplace. I am currently expecting my first child in the next few weeks and have been focusing on educating myself on the policies and practices that support nursing mothers in the workplace, as well as any possible barriers to establishing pumping when I return to the office from maternity leave.

Breastfeeding Benefits

Breastfeeding is a natural process that is highly beneficial to infants and young babies. Infants gain nutrients and crucial antibodies for immunity from their mothers through breast milk during the first six months of their lives. Breastfeeding also benefits nursing mothers by releasing the bonding

hormone oxytocin and reducing the mother's risk of suffering from type 2 diabetes, ovarian cancer, and breast cancer (Office of Women's Health, 2014). According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), infants who breastfeed for the first six months of their lives are less likely to experience "hospitalization due to respiratory infection, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), [and] obesity in childhood" (NIH, 2014). Since the recommended timeframe for breastfeeding extends well beyond the standard leave of absence granted for maternity leave, the implications of breastfeeding and pumping in the workplace are key issues. Although breastfeeding is widely recognized as an important part of an infant's healthy development, breastfeeding in a public space can make others uncomfortable.

The Rights of a Nursing Mother in California

In the state of California and at the federal level, legislation promotes and protects a nursing mother's ability to breastfeed in public spaces. California Civil Code 43.3 states a "mother may breastfeed her child in any location, public or private...where the mother and the child are...authorized to be present" (California Department of Public Health, 2015). A nursing mother's rights are also protected in her workplace. In 1998, the California State Assembly issued a resolution supporting breastfeeding and expressing breast milk in the workplace. California Assembly Concurrent Resolution # 155 from 1998 states the following: "Legislature respectfully memorializes the Governor to declare by executive order that all State of California employees shall be provided with adequate facilities for breastfeeding, or the expressing of milk" (California Breastfeeding Coalition, 2014). The legislation

that supports the California State Assembly's resolution is California Labor Code 1030-1033. This labor code outlines the parameters regarding breaks for expressing breast milk and providing a secure location that is not a public restroom to do so.

Breastfeeding or pumping in the workplace can be an uncomfortable topic to bring up for a new mother, non-parenting co-workers, and the employer. California employees are protected by California Labor Code 1030-1033, but there are restrictions, including code 1032, which states: " an employer is not required to provide break time under this chapter if to do so would seriously disrupt the operations of the employer" (CDPH, 2015). It is important for the expectant or nursing mother to educate herself about her rights and to bring up her requests for accommodation in a respectful, clearly communicated manner with her employer. Creating an open dialogue about nursing and pumping can help to dispel some of the discomfort surrounding the issue (Grant, 2011).

Maintaining Balance for Other Employees

Some people, especially non-parenting co-workers, can feel uncomfortable when it comes to nursing occurring in the workplace. The topic of breasts is taboo, especially because they are linked to a sexual context (Alexander, 2007). Often, many people do not know how to react to seeing a nursing mother, other than to feel uncomfortable and to express feelings of negativity. Breastfeeding is perceived by both nursing mothers and non-parents as highly personal. No one wants to tell a mother that she cannot take care of her child, but the discomfort of other co-workers must be

addressed in order to keep the atmosphere of the workplace productive for everyone. Keeping open lines of communication is key, and that can help with creating a plan where the breastfeeding mother's rights are protected per California Labor Code 1030-1033 while maintaining balance for other non-nursing employees.

The conversation about breastfeeding and pumping accommodations at the workplace should take place during pregnancy and before maternity leave begins (Grant, 2011). This allows the mother's employer to get over any initial rush of discomfort and to effectively plan a comfortable, cost-effective space for when the nursing mother returns to work. Once the mother has completed maternity leave, then she should strategize her return so that she can effectively nurse her baby and start the infant on a schedule. The U. S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends that a nursing mother should return to work part time for a short period in order to ease into pumping, allowing the infant to adjust to changes in the feeding schedule (HRSA, 2008). If the employer offers childcare or there is a childcare facility nearby, then the nursing mother can arrange for coinciding break times or a split shift so that she can nurse during the middle of the day (HRSA, 2008). Making a plan for all of the fine details can help to ease the way for a comfortable pumping situation that does not upset the workplace's harmony.

Another way to dispel discomfort of non-nursing co-workers when it comes to broaching the topic of breastfeeding is to approach it from an educational standpoint. Employers can organize a workshop for their employees so that

they can understand the importance of breastfeeding an infant. They can also learn that breastfeeding benefits the company as well. Breastfeeding mothers tend to take less sick days to care for their baby because “breastfed infants tend to be healthier than bottle-fed infants,” allowing the company to save money on healthcare costs (Grant, 2011). Holding a workshop also allows non-nursing co-workers to voice exactly what may make them uncomfortable about breastfeeding in the workplace, allowing employers to manage those concerns when they formulate their plan to accommodate nursing mothers. Finding out concerns during a workshop allows co-workers to speak freely about their feelings without having to feel guilty about putting a new mother on the spot.

Managing equity in the workplace for non-nursing employees while protecting the important rights of nursing mothers requires tact and focus. Helping non-nursing employees to become self-aware of their inherent discomforts can help them move forward in creating a supportive environment for their nursing co-workers. Non-nursing employees are more likely to react favorably to breastfeeding accommodations if they are given the opportunity to understand the importance of the accommodations and feel like their concerns have been heard and addressed by management. Non-parenting employees want to feel like their comfort is part of the equation, thus “loyalty and engagement improves...[workers] perform better when they feel like they fit” (Forte, 2014).

Conclusion

There are many possible ways to address equity in the workplace when it comes to accommodating nursing mothers while also maintaining a balance of comfort of non-parenting workers. However, it is definitely wrong to deny a working mother legally mandated accommodations to either breastfeed or express milk in a quiet, secure, clean location. As breastfeeding often brings up discomfort in others, it is important to create an open, non-judgmental dialogue where employees feel that their input is valued when accommodation decisions are being made. This strategy can help employers to successfully address concerns for nursing and non-nursing employees while carrying out their legal responsibilities in their place of business.