Breastfeeding in public has a stigma in our society. This stigma is causing many women to not meet their breastfeeding goals. Often they feel like they have to wean early because they are afraid to breastfeed their babies outside of their homes.

Breastfeeding in public is a civil right!
Forty-nine states, the District of Columbia and the Virgin Islands have laws that specifically allow women to breastfeed in any public or private location. (Exception is Idaho)

Twenty-nine states, the District of Columbia and the Virgin Islands exempt breastfeeding from public indecency laws.

If these laws are in place, then why are women still harassed for breastfeeding in public?

It is imperative that we begin to change our society’s perspective about breastfeeding in public, which requires a great deal of education about these civil rights as well as normalizing breastfeeding in general.

If breastfeeding in public is a civil right, why are moms afraid to breastfeed in public?
Why are moms afraid to breastfeed in public?

- Being shamed. Getting negative comments and dirty looks.
- That someone will shame or laugh at me.
- Negative comments and looks.
- At first I just was afraid of dirty looks or comments, but I am breastfeeding an almost two year old and 3 month old now, so I'm no longer afraid of that.
- My feelings about nursing in public absolutely evolved as our breastfeeding relationship progressed. As a new mom, I was nervous and felt I needed to cover. But as we worked on establishing a strong breastfeeding relationship, that was difficult to manage on my own and I transitioned to just going for it. Later when my son was still breastfeeding at 2 years old, I worried that I would start to get comments or dirty looks because he was older. But since his needs come first, we just did our thing.

State laws do not provide many moms the security to overcome these fears of public shaming. The laws are in place, but too many people don’t know about them. Plus, societal attitudes are not breastfeeding supportive.

Societal Views of Breastfeeding in Public

Public Perception and Attitudes

- Population-based public opinion telephone survey of 2,075 NYC residents, 18 years or older, conducted by the NYC Dept of Health and Mental Hygiene. 53.6% respondents women. Mixed demographics. 53.6% some college or more.
- 50.4% of respondents were not supportive of public breastfeeding, agreeing with the statement that women should breastfeed in private only.
- 33.2% of respondents were uncomfortable with women breastfeeding near them in public, such as a shopping center, bus station, etc.
Breastfeeding Knowledge and Attitudes

- Cross-sectional survey of 248 undergraduates in an introductory nutrition class at a large university.
- Breastfeeding knowledge was very high.
- Females (71%) were significantly more likely than males (47.7%) to consider public breastfeeding to be embarrassing and unacceptable.
- Authors make an excellent point. Because young infants usually eat every 2-3 hours, it is hardly possible to increase breastfeeding rates if society deems public breastfeeding to be unacceptable and embarrassing.


Online Discrimination

- Researcher wanted to gain an understanding of online opinion around a nursing-in-public harassment incident in the UK in April 2014. Collected 884 Mail Online (UK online news site) and 1210 Twitter responses to the incident and the ensuing nurse-in.
- 47% of the comments on Mail Online were considered either harsh or aggressive towards the nurse.
- 46% of the comments on Mail Online had the theme of visibility is offensive.
- 14% of the comments on Mail Online had the theme of exhibitionism.
- 11% of the comments on Mail Online made reference to NIP being similar to urination/defecation/sexual intercourse.
- 10% of the comments on Mail Online were classified as solely unsupportive.

Protecting Breastfeeding in Public: It’s a Civil Right!

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As for comparing Mail Online to Twitter: Positive Breastfeeding comments: MO (9.5%) vs. Twitter (76%); Negative Breastfeeding comments: MO (89%) vs. Twitter (3%).

Grant, Aimee. “#discrimination”: The Online Response to a Case of a Breastfeeding Mother Being Ejected from a UK Retail Premises. 2015; 1-11.
NIP Harassment Incident at Applebee’s Response: News Coverage

- 9/8/2012: A mother in Georgia was breastfeeding her 20 month old at Applebee’s.
- A manager asked her to either finish breastfeeding her child in the bathroom or leave.
- When she refused to stop or leave, he called the police on her.

[Link to news article](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/09/18/dawn-holland-breastfeeding_n_1893681.html) - accessed 1/11/16

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NIP Harassment at a Mall Response: Social Media

12/6/14

On Saturday, December 6th, the Carnival Cruise kiosk manager at the Carlsbad Outlet Mall, told a mother to leave the bench she was sitting on while breastfeeding her child and to go to the bathroom because she was making people “uncomfortable.” The manager of the kiosk told her, “We have a place in the bathroom so you can breastfeed your baby. You might be fine here, but you’re making everyone else uncomfortable.”

According to the mother, she told them she had the legal right to breastfeed there. The manager and staff members refused to listen to her, defended their actions by saying they had the right to tell the mother whatever they pleased since, “We have freedom of speech.”

Paa.la (an amazing NIP activist in CA) asked her followers to FB and Tweet comments to the Carlsbad Outlet mall and this was the result:

Paa.la poses the question: “Do you think this is enough though? What education were they providing for the employees and vendors at the mall to ensure that this situation doesn’t come up again?”


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Applebee’s Response

"This was an unfortunate misunderstanding and we hope this incident will give us another chance to demonstrate that to our personnel.

"We apologize for the incident. Our policy is the same as the law—mothers are free to breastfeed anywhere they like.

"If you have further questions, please don’t hesitate to call or email us.

"Thank you for bringing this to our attention.

"- Applebee’s Response

[Facebook page](http://www.facebook.com/Applebees)

[Applebee’s Twitter](http://twitter.com/Applebees)

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February 5, 2015
Manager at Walmart tells a mother she either has to quit nursing her baby or cover up. Mom left store feeling "humiliated."
20 or so moms staged a nurse-in the next day - handed out pamphlets to employees and shoppers about their right to breastfeed in public.
Walmart has a corporate policy supporting breastfeeding in public in their stores, as well as Oklahoma has a law that protects this right - manager stated he was unaware of this policy or state law.

http://www.takepart.com/article/2015/02/05/breastfeeding-women-descend-walmart-after-store-shames-nursing-mom

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12/30/15
State Rep. Amanda Bouldin (D) wrote a post on Facebook expressing her opposition to a proposed bill in New Hampshire that would make it a misdemeanor for women to expose their nipples in the state. Bouldin wrote an open Facebook message to the sponsor of the bill, State Rep. Josh Moore (R), saying that he should scrap the bill or at least exempt new mothers who are breastfeeding.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/new-hampshire-house-nipples-breastfeeding_568437bce4b0b958f65b19d6

Protecting Breastfeeding in Public: It’s a Civil Right!

Are mothers’ fears about breastfeeding in public warranted?

Response: See for yourself....
How can we learn from these situations and prevent them from happening in the future?

Data Collection and Support for Victim
- Best for Babies Nursing In Public hotline
  - Mothers can call and report an NIP incident on the hotline. Hope is that documenting these incidents will help encourage national change in policies.
  - Mom records a message.
  - Member of the NIP hotline team returns the call and provides support on how to remedy the situation.
- Statistics from Best for Babies, as of 1/12/16. Since Inception - October 2012 - 534 incidents have been reported across the USA, and that is only what's been reported, not necessarily assumed.

Prevention and Education
On January 8, 2013, San Diego Breastfeeding Center was contacted through Facebook about an NIP incident that was witnessed at a local courthouse.

A mother was egregiously harassed by a bailiff for nursing in the courtroom, as well as in the courthouse hallway.

The mother reported the incident to the bailiff’s supervisor and was told not to expect any sort of resolution.

Taking action

- Contacted the head of the court system, who sent me to the San Diego Police Department
- Met with the third in command at the San Diego Police Department.

Three Goals:
- To have a positive resolution to the incident
- To add an education segment to the annual training program that discusses how to best protect the rights of a breastfeeding mother while protecting decorum in the courtroom.
- To have a formal, written apology sent to Rebecca by the sheriff’s department.

Resolution

- Better than expected!
- Commander was gracious and empathetic, and had already set into motion a mandatory training bulletin to be shared with all law enforcement staff, not just the deputies who work in the court. This bulletin, which we helped to create, stated the law, as well as scenarios on how to protect the harassed mother in an NIP incident.
- Commander opened an investigation into the nursing in public harassment incident to further review the bailiff’s conduct and conduct of the mother. He also expressed how sorry he was the mom felt so humiliated the day of the incident and that he will do everything he can to make sure that a similar incident doesn’t happen again.

San Diego Nursing in Public Task Force
Creating the SD NIP Task Force
From the Ground Up

- Collaborated with our local breastfeeding coalition
- Moral Support
- Host the online resources
- Volunteer meeting
- Identify community needs
- Distribute tasks
- Set up webpage and Task Force contact info on SDBFC’s website

SD NIP Task Force’s Mission

- Educate our community about the California laws that protect mothers’ right to breastfeed in public.
- Provide support and guidance to mothers who have faced harassment or discrimination for breastfeeding in public.
- Empower mothers, by providing resources that empower them on their rights and roles to handle a harassment incident.
- Empower business owners, by providing resources that they can integrate into their employee handbooks and training materials so that they are compliant with California law.

SD NIP Task Force’s Role

- To maintain an online resource for community members to prevent and ameliorate nursing in public discrimination.
- Serve as local advocates for mothers who have faced harassment for breastfeeding in public.

NIP Task Force Online Resources

- CA law, as well as link to US laws
- Scenarios for how to handle NIP harassment incident
- Template letter for mom to send after NIP harassment incident
- Steps to remedying an NIP harassment incident (for moms, businesses, and other task forces)
- Steps to filing complaint with DFEH
- Resources for businesses
- Videos for breastfeeding in carriers/wraps
- http://www.sdbfc.com/nip/
Since May 2013, the San Diego Nursing in Public Task Force has helped to mediate over a dozen NIP Harassment incidents.

**Protecting Breastfeeding in Public: It's a Civil Right! - 2016**

- **Flexing our NIP Muscles**
  - Local incidents
    - FOX 5 News
    - Applebee's
    - LA Fitness
    - Chic's store
  - Padres' stadium incident: the team fired back and public knew they had power
  - Pediatrician's office with a sign asking to cover up
  - Workplace accommodation situations: multiple
  - Poway School district
  - YMCA pool
  - Out of the area incidents
    - Public pool

**Feedback from businesses**

**Poway School District**

- Feedback from businesses
Feedback from Mothers

Mom asked to leave LA Fitness because she was breastfeeding in the dressing room.

Do you feel like having a local Nursing in Public Task Force makes you feel more confident about NIP? Why or why not?

Yes, it makes me feel more confident, as it's raising more awareness for what should be normal. It helps to push the awareness of what is still normal for what some people can do. (Realistic)

Yes, you would always want someone there to back you up. Sometimes it's hard to stand up for yourself, especially when multiple people put you down.

Yes, it's just sad that it's needed. It doesn't make me feel more confident, because I already feel confident. However I REALLY appreciate that it's there in case anything happens to me or a friend!

Feedback from Mothers

Protecting Breastfeeding in Public: It's a Civil Right!

Areas Where We Would Like to Expand our Resources (as requested by our local moms)

I think having a local NIP Task force is awesome. I knew that if ever got into a situation where my rights were being threatened as far as being able to freely breastfeed my son, there was a team standing by to come in and help to educate in a respectful and impactful way.

I am grateful to have this community resource if needed. I'm always glad to know someone has your back. I think positive comments from others is the biggest confidence builder, as well as knowing that my behavior or positive comments have changed the behavior of those who watch me in the situation.

Yes, it's just sad that it's needed. It doesn't make me feel more confident, because I already feel confident. However I REALLY appreciate that it's there in case anything happens to me or a friend!
More Resources

- PowerPoint presentation for childbirth educators and lactation educators to share in prenatal classes about right to NIP and NIP Task Force resources
- Templates for businesses to create NIP-friendly policies
- Postive NIP stories
- More NIP Videos
- E-Commerce
- National NIP Task Force website!!!!

Conclusions

- Education, education, education (families, businesses, organizations, community members) = breastfeeding normalization
- Breastfeeding normalization (More comfortable a woman feels about breastfeeding on the go) = less bottles and longer breastfeeding duration
- Longer breastfeeding duration = increased breastfeeding rates and moms meeting their personal breastfeeding goals
- It all starts with education
- Must educate businesses and organizations so that their staff members know how to handle these situations appropriately, should they arise.
- More community-based support for preventing nursing in public harassment and empowering mothers with tools to remedy harassment incidents.