



IABLE

Institute for the Advancement of Breastfeeding & Lactation Education

Partner Support During Lactation

A supportive father or partner plays a **vital role** in the success of breastfeeding. Studies show that when a breastfeeding or lactating parent has partner support, they **lactate longer** and have a **lower risk of postpartum anxiety and depression**.

Offer Emotional Support & Encouragement

- **Praise your breastfeeding partner** and give them positive feedback on what they are doing well.
- Mothers and other breastfeeding parents may **face doubts and obstacles** — worrying whether the baby is getting enough milk or coping with day-and-night feedings that lead to exhaustion. **Your firm support** is priceless.
- **Listen first, then offer solutions.** A simple “just give a bottle” can lead to defeat, anger, and grief. Listen, validate, and ask what they need.

Provide Practical & Physical Help

- **Nourish your breastfeeding partner.** Help them eat and drink. When they sit down to feed or pump, refill their water, bring a snack, and ask what they need.
- **Take over household tasks.** Dishes, laundry, cleaning, and care for other children — so your partner can focus on healing, resting, and feeding.
- **Arrange extra help.** A relative, friend, mother’s helper, or postpartum doula.
- **Give them a break.** Hold the baby skin-to-skin while your partner showers, eats, or rests.
- **Care for older children.** A great time to connect with siblings adjusting to the new baby.

Navigating Nighttime Feedings

Offering to give a bottle so the lactating parent can sleep is a thoughtful gesture, but it can affect milk production. Understanding the trade-offs helps you support your partner best.

- **Bottle feeding can reduce milk production,** as bottle feeding expressed milk or formula can delay the next feed at the breast because babies tend to drink much higher volumes from a bottle as compared to the breast. Also, the lactating parent will likely need to pump at that same time, especially in the early days.
- **If deciding to bottle feed and waking to pump isn’t possible,** have them pump just before and after their stretch of sleep to limit the drop in production.
- **A helpful alternative:** wake and change the baby, bring them to the lactating parent for the feeding, and handle everything after. Every extra moment of rest counts.

Bond with Your Baby

There are many ways for fathers and partners to bond with their baby — feeding is just one activity.

- Talk to your baby. Babies crave attention through holding, singing, talking, and eye contact.
- Read books together.
- Share bath time, diaper changes, and nail clipping.
- Cuddle and slow dance.
- Skin-to-skin contact.
- Take walks together.

Be Patient & Flexible

- **Babies change quickly.** Their behavior evolves day to day, and most don't stick to a schedule for long. Patience keeps stress low.
- **Don't take preferences personally.** Babies sometimes prefer the lactating parent — this is temporary and natural. The more time you spend with your baby, the less this occurs. Both parents form strong bonds over time.

Watch for Signs — Mental Health Matters

It is normal for the birthing/lactating parent to experience **baby blues**, especially in the first month postpartum. Continued symptoms may signal postpartum depression or anxiety.

Warning signs to watch for:

- Ongoing sadness, exhaustion, anxiety, or irritability
- Appearing overwhelmed or loss of motivation
- Difficulty enjoying fun activities
- Changes in appetite or weight
- Difficulty sleeping or concentrating
- Panic attacks
- Decreased self-esteem or interest in the baby
- Less interest in socializing
- Wishing life would end

If You Notice These Signs — Help Your Partner Reach Out

Gently encourage them to **speak to their healthcare provider** or help them schedule the appointment. If your partner is struggling with breastfeeding, encourage them to call a lactation specialist — or make the call for them.

Take Care of Yourself, Too

The non-birthing / non-lactating parent can also experience **postpartum depression** and anxiety and can be affected by traumatic births and difficult feeding journeys. If you notice these feelings in yourself, seek help and talk with your partner.

Resources

- [Postpartum Support International](#) — online resource with connections to local mental health support for both the lactating/birthing parent and their partner.
- [Help for Dads & Partners](#) — resources specifically for fathers and non-birthing partners.