

Breastfeeding at the University of Bristol: Advice from the Parents and Carers Network

We know the University of Bristol is committed to being an inclusive and equitable organisation, and one that recognises the importance of breastfeeding to the health and wellbeing of parents and children.

Returning to work after having a baby can be a daunting time, and if you're breastfeeding your new little one, you may worry about how you'll continue to do this in the office environment.

We've produced this handy advice sheet to support new parents during this time. It also includes useful information for managers so they can better support breastfeeding parents in the work environment.

This guidance applies to all members of staff who are feeding their baby or child any amount of their breastmilk be that via direct feeding or expressing. It also applies to non-birthing parents who have induced lactation following situations such as their partner giving birth, surrogacy and adoption.

We want to support you to breastfeed for as long as you choose. So let's get started!

Advice for breastfeeding parents

Being open and honest with your line manager about your intention to continue breastfeeding when you return to work can help this transition to run smoothly. We recommend you let them know in writing that you are breastfeeding. Before you have a discussion it's helpful for you to be clear in your mind about what it is you think you'll need to support you to continue to breastfeed/express. This may include things like:

- How many breaks you might need and how long these are likely to need to be?
- If you are planning to pump, will you need a space to do this and what will you need (e.g. do you need a power outlet?)
- Where you will store your expressed milk?
- Maintaining open dialogue with your line manager over the course of your transition back to work and throughout the time that you are continuing to breastfeed/express at work will also help to maintain a supportive environment. So if something changes, then let your line manager know.

If you're feeling nervous or embarrassed about talking to your line manager about breastfeeding/expressing, you can ask for a supportive person to be with you for these discussions. Remember that your line manager should be aware of this guidance and be ready for the possibility of this conversation, so it shouldn't come as a surprise to them.

Practical information

- Time Management

If you agree breaks or a flexible work schedule to accommodate the time required for expressing milk or feeding your child directly, ensure these are blocked in your diary. Communicate any scheduling conflicts and discuss potential solutions with your line manager.

- Breast Pump and Accessories

Not all parents need to express to maintain their breastfeeding relationship when they return to work. If you are expressing, you'll need to bring a breast pump and any necessary accessories to the workplace. For example, you may need to remember to bring a cool bag and/or ice packs as well as a pump.

- Storage of Breast Milk

Properly store expressed breast milk in a refrigerator or cooler with ice packs to maintain its freshness and in the way agreed with your line manager. If a communal fridge is used, it's recommended to store expressed breast milk in a clearly labelled and sealed container to maintain hygiene and prevent cross-contamination.

- University premises

The university has legal duties to ensure that any visitor will be safe whilst using its premises and there is a higher duty of care when the visitor is a child/young person. In order to ensure that your child is safe were you to bring them onto any university premises you **MUST**

1. Ensure you have your managers permission to bring your child on to into buildings that are not open to the public
2. Ensure your child is closely supervised at all times when on university premises

Information for managers

The World Health Organization recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life and recommends continuing to breastfeed alongside solid foods for two years and beyond. There is no set time at which breastfeeding should be expected to stop and therefore when supporting a member of staff back to work following the arrival of a baby in their family it's important to be aware that the employee may have needs relating to breastfeeding.

No employee should be discriminated against or experience a worse working experience on the grounds of pregnancy, childbirth or maternity, irrespective of hours of work or service.

Continuing a breastfeeding relationship following a return to work is a wellbeing issue. Where parents are prevented from breastfeeding or expressing this may result in depression or anxiety; or physical issues such as mastitis or breast abscess. These can lead to periods of sick leave which can be avoided with appropriate support.

The legal bit...

Maternity is a protected characteristic in the Equality Act 2010, however, there is no specific protection for breastfeeding in the workplace (yet). There are, however, provisions in the Equality Act and other legislation, plus guidance by ACAS, HSE, and the Equalities and Human Rights Commission.

There are a number of legal protections for breastfeeding mothers:

- Health and safety protection (includes risk assessments, a suitable place to rest)
- Flexible working
- Discrimination
- Harassment

What does breastfeeding at work look like?

Breastfeeding a baby or child can take many different forms and this will be reflected in the experience of employees. No two colleagues will have the same needs so when supporting them to continue their breastfeeding relationship when returning to work, an individualised, person-centred approach is important.

Here are some examples of what breastfeeding when returning to work might look like for some parents - this is not intended to be exhaustive or illustrative of universal experiences.

Employee A went back to work when her baby was 7 months old. The baby was eating some solids but still very reliant on breastfeeding for nutrition and comfort and would not take milk in a bottle. Employee A agreed with her manager that she could work from home 3 days a week, which meant she could go over the road to the baby's nursery in her lunch breaks to feed. On her 2 office days, her partner brought the baby to her at lunch time so they could breastfeed in the University café. By 12 months the baby was happy to have water and cow's milk to drink from a sippy cup when away from mum and so the lunchtime visits were no longer needed. Employee A continued to breastfeed in the evenings and on days they were with the baby.

Employee B also returned to work when their baby was 7 months old. Their baby was happy to have breastmilk in a bottle when away from their parent and to breastfeed directly at weekends and on non-working days. Employee B's line manager agreed that they could take two pumping breaks of around 15 minutes each during the day to ensure they had milk to leave for their baby and for breast health/comfort. They arranged for Employee B to book a lockable meeting room for those times and checked with the building manager that there was a suitable fridge to store milk. Employee B managed their workload around these breaks and met their original objectives.

Employee C returned to work when their baby was 14 months old. Their baby was eating plenty of solids and the employee was also continuing to breastfeed when with the baby. The baby was able to go without feeding for several hours. When Employee C discussed their return to work with their line manager, they were concerned there might be times they would need to express for comfort. The line manager suggested using the first aid room to express at lunchtime or when needed. Employee C decided that that they didn't need any additional adjustments. In the end, Employee C only needed to express on one or two occasions as their supply adjusted quickly, but felt supported by their line manager.

How you can support breastfeeding parents at work

When discussing an employee's return to work, be clear that the University wants to support them in all aspects of making this transition as smooth as possible. Part of this might be supporting breastfeeding. Breastfeeding looks different for different families and for children at different ages, so asking what would be supportive and helpful should be part of the conversation. Not all parents will need or want to express milk. Some might want opportunities to go to the University nursery to feed their baby in breaks.

You could include statements or questions such as:

“If you are breastfeeding we can make arrangements for you to feed or express on campus”

“Will you need any provisions for breastfeeding or expressing when you return to work?”

Successfully combining work and breastfeeding may take a bit of working out and the employee may not be able to accurately predict what they may need. You can discuss what options are available to them based on the specific circumstances of their job role. These options may include:

- Expressing at work
- Breastfeeding at work (e.g. their baby being delivered to them on campus)
- Returning home or visiting nursery during lunch breaks in order to breastfeed.

Flexible working and paid breaks

The University's Flexible Working Policy states that "a great deal of flexibility exists on working hours across the University, and the University wishes to support and encourage such an approach where possible." Managers are therefore encouraged to think creatively about how they can offer flexibility to their staff that supports breastfeeding. This might look like:

- Blocking time in their diary for expressing
- Allowing extra breaks outside of lunchtimes, with time made up elsewhere
- Supporting a change to working patterns such as working from home on some days.

You can find more information about Flexible and Blended working options in the relevant HR policies.

Health and safety/ risk assessments

All parents returning from parental leave should have a risk assessment. When an employee is breastfeeding this should consider potentially harmful exposures.

- Health and Safety Executive guidance includes the following risks:
- Mercury
- Lead
- Certain biological agents may be transmitted through breastfeeding or through close physical contact between mother and child. Examples of agents where the child might be infected are hepatitis B, HIV (the AIDS virus), herpes, syphilis, chickenpox and typhoid. For most workers, the risk of infection is not higher at work than elsewhere, but in certain occupations exposure to infections is more likely, for example laboratory work, health care, looking after animals or dealing with animal products.
- Substances labelled R64 may cause harm to breastfed babies.

This risk assessment should be individual to that person and should be reviewed at regular intervals. More guidance is available from Safety and Health Services.

<https://bristol.ac.uk/safety/media/gn/new-expect-mothers-gn.pdf>

Provide a safe space

Where possible, a dedicated breastfeeding facility should be identified in each building. This could include using a first aid or quiet space.

The facility should have:

- A lockable door
- A sink for handwashing
- A safe place to wash and dry breast pumps
- A fridge
- Comfortable seating
- An electrical socket

Where it is not possible to have a dedicated facility then arrangements should be made on a case-by-case basis and employees should be offered a clean, safe space for breastfeeding or expressing. This could include ability to book an office or meeting room. Where possible this will also include access to a secure fridge in which to store expressed milk.

If no space in the building/ school is available then line managers should reach out to the nearest school/ building to enquire as to what options they may have available.

The toilet is never an appropriate option and should not be offered or considered in any circumstances.

Useful links

There are many organisations out there that can offer you advice and support on your breastfeeding journey. Here are some you might find useful:

The [National Breastfeeding Helpline](#) (0300 100 0212 and via webchat and social media) provides evidence-based support around breastfeeding

[Continuing to breastfeed when you return to work](#) - Maternity Action

[Returning to work while breastfeeding](#) – ABM

[Working and Breastfeeding](#) - La Leche League GB

[Resources: Working & Pumping Tips](#) – Kellymom.com

[Breastfeeding and going back to work](#) - NHS

A bit about the Parents and Carers Network

We hope you've found this guide useful. The Parents and Carers Network is for University of Bristol staff who are parents or carers (in any context). Our aim is to facilitate mutual support, share experiences, signpost queries and to represent your views to the University. More information is available on our website:
<https://www.bristol.ac.uk/inclusion/staff-networks/parents-and-carers-network/>