Talking with Breastfeeding Moms in the Real World:
Strategies for the Tough ones

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Learning Objectives:
1. Identify factors that influence decision-making among pregnant and breastfeeding women.
2. Identify two common emotional “triggers” for women making decisions about breastfeeding.
3. Demonstrate the ability to use active listening skills in counseling women about breastfeeding.
4. Name at least three educational strategies for communicating information effectively with new moms.

The Power of Listening
- The power of listening vs. talking
- Temptations that lead us astray
  - Complicating breastfeeding
  - Doing all the talking
  - Persuading women to breastfeed
  - Shoving pamphlets instead of talking to moms
- Ways to listen:
  1. Research
     - Fussy babies mean hungry babies (DaMota 2012)
     - Supplements given at the hospital must be continued at home (Holmes 2009)
  2. The mother’s influencers
     - Social Ecological Model
     - Maternal grandmother – may be strongest influencer in the mother’s decisions (Grassley 2008; Susin 2005)
     - Baby’s father – the more prepared they are during prenatal period the more confident they are in supporting their partner (Mitchell-Box 2013; Maycock 2013; Susin 2008; Giugliani 1994)
• Culture – women are impacted by gender roles they have assumed, cultural practices and beliefs, and experiences both positive and negative that shape who they are (Gibson-Davis 2006)
• Experiences
3. What SHE listens to. Parents typically turn to the Internet for their source of information about parenting and birth (Plantin 2009)

Emotional Triggers that Drive Decision-Making

- Building self-efficacy (Dennis 1999)
  • Performance accomplishments - Mastering
  • Vicarious experiences - Modeling
  • Verbal persuasion - Praise
  • Physiological and Affective States – Positive feelings

- What women want: Powerful Emotional Triggers (www.touchingheartstouchingminds.com)
  1.
  2.
  3.
  4.
  5.
  6.

- Examples of emotional messages
- Telling people “it’s good for you” doesn’t work!
- Human beings are guided by EMOTIONS, not LOGIC. FEELINGS are more important than FACTS. People are feeling machines that think, not thinking machines that feel.

“If facts are the seeds that later produce knowledge and wisdom, then the emotions and the impressions of the senses are the fertile soil in which the seeds must grow.”

--Rachel Carson

OLD MODEL: LEARN→FEEL→DO
NEW MODEL: FEEL→THINK→DO

- Female brains appear to be “wired” to connect and form emotional bonds (Arnold 2004; Becker 2005; Brizendine 2006)

- Women have powerful talents for reading faces, perhaps due to increased “mirroring” neurons that enhance sensitivity to emotional stimuli. This may help explain why some studies show
women often make assumptions about their partner’s support of breastfeeding, even if they have never discussed it. (Cheng 2009; Rehnman 2007)

- Women tend to score higher in tests involving verbal skills. This might be explained in part to the fact that a woman’s corpus colosum (a major neural system connecting the right and left hemispheres of the brain) appears to be larger in women, which may permit better communication between the two hemispheres. Women also typically use their heightened verbal talents to cement emotional relationships. (Kimura 2002)

- When facing stressful situations, women are more likely to report seeking social support and using emotion-focused coping to a greater extent than men, whereas men reported using relatively more problem-focused coping than women (Ptacek 1994)

- Our challenge as counselors: build connection with women through emotion-based counseling that respects where they are in the learning process, affirms their efforts to be good mothers, and targets messages through powerful emotional “pulse points.”
  - Being a great mother
  - Having the power to make a meaningful impact on the family and children’s lives
  - Feeling good about herself
  - Being successful and intelligent

Communication Tools that Build Connection
- Language of Connection (Devite 1989)
  - Words account for ______ % of the message received
  - Tone of voice accounts for ______ % of the message received
  - Body language/facial expressions account for _________ % of message received.

- Body Language
  - Varies across cultures and needs to reflect the client population.
  - Women rely on visual communication (body language, eye contact, etc.) to determine acceptance. (Brizendine 2006)
  - Comfortable position creates a warm and inviting climate.
  - Touch can convey warmth, caring, and encouragement.
  - Learn to read the body language of mothers.
  - Tone of voice – use moderate volume and rate of speed.

- Active-Listening Skills
  - Open-Ended Questions
    - The problem with closed questions
✓ How open questions work
✓ Framing questions: *what, how, tell me*

- Probing
- Affirmation
  ✓ The power of affirmation
  ✓ 5 ways to affirm
    1.
    2.
    3.
    4.
    5.

- Education
  ✓ Assessing readiness
  ✓ Simple principles

✓ **5 Ways to Get a Good Start with Breastfeeding**
  1. Magical first hour
  2. Skin to skin
  3. Stay close to baby
  4. Feeding cues
  5. Get help

**Using active listening skills in difficult situations**

- Openly hostile or defensive
  - Define the “real” issue bothering her
  - Power of affirmation
- Shy
  - Watch your tendency to interrogate
  - Power of affirmation
- Overwhelmed
  - Be careful about giving too much information
  - Narrow down options to the one or two solutions that have best chance to help
  - Power of affirmation
- Language issues
  - Family members as interpreters
  - Peer counselors and educators
- Mom’s partner or another family seem to “own” her
  - Acknowledge the important role of the family member
  - Cultural sensitivity
  - The power of affirmation for the family member
Putting it All Together

- Effective education using adult learning techniques – Moving from TELLING to ENGAGING
  - **TELLING**
    - Watch for “teachable” moments – assess readiness
    - Use simple language
    - Target message to what’s relevant
    - Explain the HOW and WHY; be honest
    - Give information in small bites
    - Provide 2-3 options
  - **SHOWING:**
    - Make it visual
    - Provide demonstration opportunities
    - Consider multisensory learning opportunities
    - Share stories. The human brain is hard-wired to process stories better than scientific data
    - Repeat! Repeat! Repeat!
      (Russell 2006; Green 2002)
  - **ENGAGING:**
    - Allow the mother to take ownership of the plan
    - The mother conducts the demonstration with you
    - The mother summarizes the plan to confirm you are on the same page
    - Face the problem…and the solution…*TOGETHER*
    - Agree on a follow-up plan
    - Humor. It reduces tension and integrates the right/left hemispheres of the brain for better critical thinking and learning (Chabeli 2008)
  - Inspire and give hope
  - The power of praise

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