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Empower families, support breastfeeding

August is Breastfeeding Awareness Month. This year's theme is "Empower Families, Support Breastfeeding". Breastfeeding has many known benefits. Breastfeeding lowers a baby's risk of SIDS, ear infections, stomach problems, colds, asthma, eczema, diabetes, leukemia and more. It also lowers a mother's risk of breast cancer, ovarian cancer and type 2 diabetes. All major health groups say babies should be breastfed for at least one year and beyond as long as the mother and baby wish.

Breastfeeding is the normal way to feed a baby, but it doesn't always come easy! It can take time and practice. For many mothers, there is a "learning curve". It may take a few days or weeks, but with the right support, all mothers can breastfeed. This support can come in many forms. Partners, family, friends, work places, the public, and the government all have unique roles to play in empowering mothers to breastfeed their babies.

Paid maternity leave allows a mother to support her family and still heal from birth, bond with her child, and take needed time to learn how to breastfeed her baby. Paid paternity leave and paid family leave is just as crucial. When a mother has her partner or other support person caring for her during the early weeks, she can heal from birth and focus on bonding with and nursing her baby.

When a mother can't take much time off work after having her baby, flexible work arrangements can help her to breastfeed. Mom can take breaks to go feed her baby, bring her baby to work with her, or take pumping breaks to maintain her milk supply and allow her to keep nursing her baby. Work places can play a strong role in helping families by giving new moms these options.

Partners, family and friends can help a mother breastfeed by caring for her, her older children and her home so she can focus on the baby. They can learn about breastfeeding and help a mother if she has concerns about nursing her baby. Communities can empower mothers by posting signs that welcome nursing in public places and making private nursing rooms available on request.

The Clermont County Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program empowers families through education and practical support. WIC's Breastfeeding Peer Helpers are available to help WIC moms via phone calls, a texting program, an after-hours breastfeeding hotline, and in-person support at the WIC clinic. WIC's Breastfeeding Peers teach breastfeeding classes and lead a support group that are both open to the public. WIC helps moms obtain a breast pump, speak up for themselves in the workplace, and feel confident while nursing their babies. WIC reaches out to hospitals, doctor's offices and community groups to work with them to support breastfeeding.

A mother may be the one breastfeeding her baby, but she doesn't do it alone. The support she has around her from her partner, her family and her community will help her feel empowered and sure that she can feed her baby and meet her breastfeeding goals!