

Perspective and Normalcy

Coach Smith here again. How we view babies depends a LOT on our perspective. Are they normal until proven otherwise, or "accidents waiting to crash and burn?" The answer is YES, both!

Our perspective comes from our training and experience. As a practicing lactation consultant, I mostly see babies with problems. The calls I receive are from moms with problems. I rent pumps to moms who are separated from their babies, again a problem situation. Now when I see a normal, happy, thriving baby at the mall I start looking for any problems, because that's what I do for a living. This is far, far different from what I saw during my 25 years as a La Leche League Leader and Childbirth Educator. I saw mostly normal, thriving babies and their moms. Month after month, meeting after meeting, I saw normal breastfeeding over and over and over in many different contexts. The foundation of "normal" got laid down in my memory/experience bank as a very thick layer on which to base my current practice and teaching.

Health professionals in general, and physicians in particular, are expected to learn a lot in a short period of time during their training. They are responsible for finding and treating problems, so it makes sense to focus on all the awful things that can happen, and hone their diagnostic skills. What often gets shortchanged is a thick layer of normal as the foundation. [I think this is true for many aspects of health care, not just breastfeeding.]

Docs tend to rule out the worst stuff first, then may refer to others with less costly fees who will provide ongoing support in the variations of normal. For example, the doc refers a mom to a peer counselor or LLL group. The viewpoint is "Rule out problems, what is left is normal." The other approach is also valid: a mother, peer counselor or LLL Leader sees something that is NOT normal and refers to the doctor for expert care in the unusual situation. The viewpoint is "Support and assume normal first, what is left may be a problem."

Either way, we all need to know NORMAL breastfeeding, which usually takes place quietly and without fanfare in homes, malls, churches, parks and back yards. Not in hospitals, doctor's offices, or even LC practices.

My plea to everyone is to keep our eyes on NORMAL breastfeeding, with a trained eye ready to spot the (rare) true problems. Remember, nobody knows everything. And be patient - with ourselves, with others who have different view points, and with our clients. It took us XX years to get where we are now, and others are at different places on this road of discovery.

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