



Wendy Jones Blog – Breastfeeding for Dads and Grandmas

I've just spent time with my daughters, their partners and 3 grandchildren, two of whom are still being breastfed (21 months and 6 months). Having just had a new book published called *Breastfeeding for Dads and Grandmas* it made me think how different our holidays were in a very pro breastfeeding family than they might be in other families?



The son in law who has yet to have children, is totally comfortable with sitting next to his sisters in law as they breastfeed and has been immeasurably supportive to his own sister. She was going to “give breastfeeding a go” but is now as committed as our family and doesn't understand why anyone would feed in any other way.

However, the number of emails and Facebook messages from mothers suffering from anxiety since the beginning of the New Year has reached unbelievable levels – on average 3 a day every day. Why might that be I wondered?

I suspect that for many other mothers spending longer than usual in close proximity to the extended family can be stressful. The emotions seem to run at fever pitch in the Festive Season – everyone wants it to be perfect. Most of us spend too much, eat too much, drink too much, don't exercise as much and generally suffer from “liverishness” as my Grandma used to term it (usually with an added “everyone could do with a good dose of syrup of figs!”).

Nevertheless in this hot pot of emotion, parents try to manage their babies needs for quiet to feed or sleep, not to be cuddled by Great Aunt Ethel when they want Mum, don't want to eat the rich offerings of solids suitable for babies (really?).

Inevitably the subject of infant feeding gets raised at some point during the visit. In our very pro-breastfeeding house the mums were supported. But what if you are with mother-in-law who formula fed your partner and makes no secret of her distaste of breastfeeding? How does your partner feel? How do you feel/ Desperate to keep the peace he might seem to agree with his mother. Neither of you wants to get into an argument but you are both secure in your decision to breastfeed. It is difficult isn't it? If the baby cries you hear the comment “is he hungry again? Your milk can't be good enough”. You are feeding quietly “what again? Surely you can't have enough milk”. Feeding late at night/overnight/co-sleeping “When my children were babies they were in bed by 6pm and we didn't hear from them again till 8am”. And Heaven forfend that you should dare to continue breastfeeding into toddlerhood!

It is no surprise that come January these new mums are anxious and more than a little depressed. Being a mum isn't easy, these babies don't read the books and don't abide by any rules. Each baby is an individual and will reach his/her milestones in their own sweet time. Cherish every milky moment, every snuggle, every smile as all too soon they will grow up. When you feel that someone is criticising you smile sweetly, acknowledge the comment but then LET IT GO. This is your baby, you make the decisions. The advice on timing of feeds, weaning, sleeping has all changed dramatically in the past 35 years (I know because I have been a mum in this time and gone on to support lots of others). It's ok to breastfeed for comfort as well as nutrition, there is no such thing as using the nipple as a dummy, it is ok to co sleep if you want, it's equally ok not to if you choose, it is also ok to ignore the advice of your mother, mother in law or Great Aunt Ethel!

Oh, cleaning and scrubbing will wait till tomorrow,

But children grow up, as I've learned to my sorrow.

So quiet down, cobwebs. Dust, go to sleep.

I'm rocking my baby. Babies don't keep.

Song for a Fifth Child (Babies Don't Keep)

by Ruth Hulburt Hamilton