

ABM Social media policy

The purpose of this policy is to support ABM breastfeeding counsellors and mother supporters in navigating the world of social media and to better understand how they can combine their role within the ABM with a social media presence. The ABM Central Committee are conscious that many of our members are experienced in social media and we are confident many of the statements will be practice that comes as second-nature to them as a result of their ABM training.

An ABM mother supporter or breastfeeding counsellor should be aware of both the limitations and opportunities presented by social media. It is a place where many mothers feel comfortable sharing their breastfeeding experiences and difficulties. It is a place where ABM breastfeeding counsellors and mother supporters may be able to offer support in a range of different ways. When online, ABM breastfeeding counsellors and mother supporters should continue to be conscious of the need for:

- 1. Effective online signposting:** giving reliable links from evidence-based sources to support the information they are giving mothers.
- 2. An awareness of the limitation of their role.** There will be times when a mother and baby should be directed to a healthcare professional or a more qualified individual. Even if other members of an online community are attempting to provide suggestions or solutions, an ABM trained MS or BFC will emphasise the need for real life care in addition to online discussion. A BFC and MS may also support a mother to find a face-to-face breast-feeding group or provide helpline numbers.
- 3. Gathering background information.** Just as with a helpline call, a member giving support online should ask questions and gather background about a mother's situation as much as possible before directing a mother to information or offering support.
- 4. A realisation that effective breastfeeding support comes from mother-to-mother support.** This may mean a counsellor pauses before responding to a query to allow other new mothers to express support and to enrich the online community she is involved with. There will be times when her specific training is needed to respond and other times when she will support mothers best by taking a step back to allow the more personal and experience-based responses. Just as when a breastfeeding counsellor facilitates a support group, she will not involve herself in every conversation.
- 5. A mother's privacy.** A BFC or MS should be not discuss directly any mother she has supported in real life on a public forum whether or not she is giving any personal information or there are identifying features. There are times when a mother may receive better support through private messaging features.
- 6. An awareness of the commercial nature of some social media.** It is expected that a breast-feeding counsellor or mother supporter is conscious of the WHO code on the marketing of breastmilk substitutes. Even when the WHO code is not in question, she should avoid promoting products (as that could be seen as an endorsement from the ABM), but can provide information about them.
- 7. Protecting themselves and their families.** When a BFC or MS takes on a more public role, they may attract interest from others which may not always be comfortable or easy. She should practice good internet safety practice with regards to posting personal information. The ABM is a small organisation and it may be easier for someone's real life identity to be discovered on an anonymous forum, particularly when someone is a breast-feeding counsellor. On occasion, not revealing the organisation she trained with may give her more freedom to discuss her personal life or speak more freely on wider issues.
- 8. A reminder that the internet is a public domain and contributions posted should be considered permanent.** Even private groups can have a screen shot taken.
- 9. A realisation that breastfeeding can inspire passionate opinion.** It is a subject which might attract trolls or involve debate that can be quite heated. BFCs and MSs are able to give information about the risks of formula where appropriate but do so in a way that is sensitive and respectful. We appreciate women make feeding choices for a variety of reasons and our role is to support mothers to reach their personal breastfeeding goals. When we are 'advocating' breastfeeding at the ABM, we do so carefully and kindly.
- 10. An awareness that they represent the ABM as an organisation.** Once an ABM member has made her breastfeeding counsellor or mother supporter status public on a site, she is then representing all ABM counsellors and ABM mother supporters and the organisation itself. This has a responsibility.
- 11. An active social media presence is not a substitute for an ABM counsellor's helpline commitment.** On qualification, a counsellor has committed to answering calls on the NBH and ABM helpline for a minimum of two years.

Some scenarios:

Kathy is an ABM breastfeeding counsellor. She administrates a local Facebook group page that is affiliated with her breastfeeding support group. On the group, she encourages mothers to talk about their problems and share their experiences. Her role is more that of a facilitator on a daily basis. She occasionally directs a mother to information and offers direct support and encourages them to come to her group for a follow-up wherever appropriate. Mothers are aware of who she is personally. The group is closed so Kathy feels more comfortable with using her normal Facebook profile.

Naya is an ABM breastfeeding counsellor. She is an admin for a large national (and partly international) Facebook page that is related to breastfeeding. She posts on the page using an admin identity which is not connected to her personal Facebook profile. She works with a team of colleagues to carefully ensure she does not become overwhelmed by the 24-hour nature of the site and she has opportunities for rests in her admin rota.

Susie is an ABM breastfeeding counsellor. She is an active member of a parenting forum. She has posted on it for many years and considers many of the members to be her friends. She has benefited from support during some difficult personal crises. She does not make public on the forum that she is an ABM breastfeeding counsellor as she prefers to continue to use the forum to speak personally and informally, sharing her personal experiences and speaking on a range of political issues. She some-times offers breastfeeding support on the board. Some of her closer friends are aware of her role within the ABM but she prefers not to add it to her signature or make it a focus of her membership on the site.

Tiana is a Mother Supporter and is training to be an ABM breastfeeding counsellor. She is a member of a parenting forum. In her signature on the forum, she states that she is an ABM mother supporter. She posts on the breastfeeding board offering information and support and signposting carefully. She switches on her 'mother supporter' head whenever she is on the board and finds posting is a worthwhile and rewarding experience.

Sally is an ABM breastfeeding counsellor. She uses her Twitter account to talk about her daily life and hobbies. Her bio does mention that she is an ABM BFC. When she does support other breastfeeding mothers, she ensures she fulfils her role as an ABM breastfeeding counsellor. Sometimes this means supporting mothers via email or private messaging to allow for a fuller conversation or greater privacy for the mother.

Sam is a Mother Supporter. She was an admin of a national parenting forum. Unfortunately the directors of the forum decided to accept sponsor-ship from a non-WHO code compliant company. They went ahead with this despite strong protests from Sam and some other members. Sam has now left this forum and supports elsewhere online.

From ABM counsellor handbook 2014