



## ABM Mother Supporter and ABM Breastfeeding Counsellor training

### What does a Mother Supporter do?

The ABM has been supporting new families for 40 years and we're excited that you are looking to join us. We offer several different training options. This info sheet tells you about training as an ABM Mother Supporter and an ABM Breastfeeding Counsellor.

**Train from home:** Our ABM Mother Supporter module is completed online. We arrange occasional study days around the UK but these are optional. Our team of markers are experienced ABM breastfeeding counsellors. Many of them are lactation consultants (IBCLC) and/or health professionals.

**Voluntary work:** Our training courses aren't intended to offer a pathway to paid employment. Job opportunities for breastfeeding counsellors are extremely rare and usually require further extensive training.

**ABM membership:** We don't ask you to pay anything until you've been accepted for training but you're very welcome to become a member at any time at [www.abm.me.uk/abm-membership/](http://www.abm.me.uk/abm-membership/)

**Outside UK:** If you live outside the UK, we regret that our Mother Supporter and Breastfeeding Counsellor courses aren't available to you. This is because we're required to take out professional indemnity insurance for all our volunteers. This insurance is valid in the UK only. Please ask for details of our Foundation and Advanced breastfeeding courses which follow a similar syllabus but aren't covered by our volunteer insurance.

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## ABM Mother Supporter course

(an online course)

As an ABM Mother Supporter, you'll offer the knowledge and support of an informed friend to breastfeeding mums in your community. You'll be able to signpost to good resources and offer practical evidence-based suggestions to mums with normal breastfeeding experiences. You won't be expected to solve complex breastfeeding problems but you'll usually recognise when a mum needs to be referred to a breastfeeding counsellor, lactation consultant or health professional. ABM volunteers provide information but we never give advice.

As an ABM Mother Supporter, you might like to help out at a local support group, or your local maternity unit (if they would welcome this). Or you might just like to use your knowledge to offer support to friends and family



## **What does the MS course cover?**

## **What support will I have?**

who are breastfeeding. It's your choice. You'll have the confidence you need to support breastfeeding mothers in your community.

Course units:

- Why is breastfeeding important?
- How breastfeeding works
- Early days of breastfeeding
- Night times
- Positioning and attachment
- Breastfeeding challenges
- Drugs, medication and illness
- Starting solid foods
- Expressing breast milk
- Myth busting
- Communication skills
- Exploring scenarios and appropriate referrals
- Your role as a mother supporter
- The International Code of marketing of breast milk substitutes
- UK breastfeeding support.

The courses also asks you to observe two mothers breastfeeding and invites you to reflect on your own breastfeeding experience.

It's essential that you've breastfed for six months before applying so that you've already met and coped with major stages e.g. growth spurts. We expect that you would have thought about starting, and introduced at least some, solid foods to your baby by the time you complete the course so that you have personal experience of this stage.

The course provides you with resources including evidence-based research articles, exclusive audio/film clips, and recommended further reading. You'll have a regional Mother Supporter coordinator and you'll be allocated a mentor who will have a special interest in supporting you through your training. You'll also find support from trainees and counsellors on our dedicated Facebook ABM Trained and Training Group.

When you've completed the lessons in each section, you'll be able to demonstrate your knowledge through a question and answer quiz. Some questions will be multiple choice while others will ask you to reflect or go into more depth. The lessons contain trusted resources which you'll need to use for this course. When you've completed each multiple choice section, you'll know whether you need to look at your answers again or if you can move forward to the next section.

When you've completed the whole course, the marking team will assess the more complex reflections and longer answer questions. Your feedback may include a request for extra work, and then possibly a further second set of revisions. If the second request for extra work does not reach the standard required this will mean you are not considered ready for the role of ABM Mother Supporter. You are welcome to reflect on your feedback, and if you feel you are ready, to reapply. When you have successfully passed the Mother Supporter module, you'll receive a congratulations email with a printable copy of your Pass Certificate.



**How long do I have to complete the MS course?**

We anticipate that the 14 lecture sections and two breastfeeding observations will need approximately 35 hours, plus another few hours once the marker has sent any extra work. Plan to spend a minimum of three hours per week to keep on track. Much of the course is self-marking which should allow you to feel confident as you move through the course content.

**We expect you to complete the course within 12 weeks** so please take this into consideration when deciding when to enrol on the course, thinking carefully about upcoming events in your family's life. Extensions may be considered by the course manager in exceptional, unforeseen circumstances, and may be subject to an additional administration fee.

**Support for you**

A local mentor (as local as possible) will be available to offer you guidance as you work through the course. Your mentor will contact you by phone or email up to four times a year to check in, but, of course, you're welcome to contact her any time you feel that you need support or a nudge in the right direction to find the information you're looking for. After you've qualified as an ABM Mother Supporter, we do encourage you to complete an annual update to enhance your initial training and ensure your practice is current and evidence-based. You could, for example, attend the annual ABM conference or an ABM study day, or one held by another recognised organisation (the Breastfeeding Network, NCT, UNICEF amongst others).

**What does the MS course cost?**

Mother Supporter training costs £25 plus our annual £20 membership fee (or £15 membership fee for households on a low income). It's essential that you've breastfed for six months before applying so that you've already met and coped with major stages e.g. growth spurts and thought about starting solid foods.

As a charity, the ABM is required to hold professional indemnity insurance for all ABM-qualified volunteers. The ABM Mother Supporter course is for mothers who want to support other breastfeeding mums voluntarily. It isn't usually an appropriate course for anyone who is a health professional in the field of infant feeding, or anyone who works in an infant-related job. This may also apply to people who work privately in postnatal support, baby massage, hypnobirthing and other jobs supporting new mothers. Please ask about our alternative Breastfeeding Support (Foundation and Advanced) training courses.

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## **ABM Breastfeeding Counsellor training** **(not an online course, this training is by email)**

**When can I apply for BFC training?**

You must pass our basic Mother Supporter module before you can apply to train as a Breastfeeding Counsellor. It's important that you complete the Mother Supporter module first. It forms the basis of our counsellor training and ensures everyone on the helpline has covered the same ground. If you've already done peer support training, it's bound to be



## What does the BFC course cover?

## How long do I have to complete the BFC course?

useful as you complete this initial module but it's not possible to bypass the Mother Supporter module.

ABM breastfeeding counsellor training is based around eight modules which are sent to you by email. You'll complete them by studying at home and return your module by email to our training team for assessment. The training programme includes anatomy and physiology, management of breastfeeding, assessing and evaluating problems, and how to resolve them with counselling and listening skills.

At the start and midway through your training, you'll be asked to find a few local mums willing to let you watch them breastfeed to help with your training. You'll get several opportunities to practise taking a helpline call with your regional breastfeeding counsellor coordinator (BFCC) before you start on the real thing.

*ABM Breastfeeding Counsellor training:*

**Mother supporter online module:** An initial module to become a mother supporter and assess your knowledge.

**Module 1:** How breastfeeding works. Includes anatomy and physiology and reflection on your own experiences.

**Module 2:** Breast and nipple problems including common challenges and the basics of counselling. Practise phone call.

**Module 3:** The importance of breastfeeding including design a poster/flyer/leaflet.

**Module 4:** Problems with milk supply including assessing a breastfeed (practical observation)

**Module 5:** Expressing and storing breastmilk. Listening skills.

**Module 6:** Postnatal depression. Colic and crying. Breast refusal. Twins and multiple births. Listening in a group situation. Practise phone call.

**Module 7:** Introducing solids. Weaning. Sleeping and night-time breastfeeding.

**Module 8:** Drugs in breastmilk. Breastfeeding the premature baby. Practise phone call.

We can't cover all the counselling questions you might meet but, after completing our training modules, you'll have a good knowledge of breastfeeding and know how to find further information if you need it. We encourage trainees to study up to date breastfeeding books and relevant journals. You should also keep your knowledge up to date once you're trained.

ABM Breastfeeding Counsellor training takes approximately two years to complete, after the initial mother supporter module. **We ask you to complete each module within six weeks**, allowing a little extra for school holidays and Christmas. Our training requires substantial self-directed reading and research. The course is demanding and not suitable for anyone already engaged in further learning.

All trainees have a regional breastfeeding coordinator who will support them throughout training and beyond. And you can access support from other trainees and counsellors through our dedicated Facebook page. After training, we expect you to remain an ABM breastfeeding counsellor for at least two years and answer calls to the helpline (from your



## **Helpline commitment**

own home). You will be committing to be available to take calls for at least 100 hours per year but you'll be able to log in and out of the helpline at times convenient to you.

Training is flexible so you can fit study around family life. There are no required weekends away or set dates for study sessions. We do hold very occasional regional workshops around the UK and encourage you to attend these if at all possible. When you've completed this training, you'll start a six month, supported, probationary counselling period on the helpline. Our counsellors tell us how rewarding it is to listen to the concerns of breastfeeding mums and be able to offer help and reassurance.

After qualifying, you'll answer calls to the helpline (from your own home) for a minimum of two years. Our helpline is open from 9.30am till 10.30pm every day. With our phone system, you can log in and out to be available for calls as convenient to you. We ask you to do a minimum of two sessions a week on the helpline for about one hour minimum per session (averaging about 100 hours over a year). Calls tend to last an average of 17 minutes.

Counsellors with heavy employment and/or family commitments can find it hard to fit in helpline calls. We ask you to consider carefully whether you'll be able to devote the necessary time to the ABM and national helplines.

## **Probationary period**

For the first six months you will be a probationary Breastfeeding Counsellor. Once you have successfully completed your six month commitment on the helpline, you'll receive your official certificate. You can then use the title Breastfeeding Counsellor. You'll stay in close contact with your regional BFCC so she can discuss any concerns you may have.

## **How much does the BFC course cost?**

The administrative cost of breastfeeding counsellor training is £100 which can be paid in two instalments. The ABM is a mother-to-mother organisation and the role of a breastfeeding counsellor is not suitable for those in a paid health professional or breastfeeding role. If you can't join our helpline team, we offer similar non-subsidised training to the same standard with our Breastfeeding Support (Advanced) training. Ask for details.

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