

Am I really a breastfeeding mother?

A few months ago a mother sent LLLC a letter. Her question to us was “am I really a breastfeeding mother?” With her permission I am sharing her story.

From Dru:

“I think that a lot of the time people forget that people like me are out there. Everyone assumes that a good mom has a baby at breast. But there are some of us that try to move mountains to make sure our babies get breastmilk even though it is not possible to breastfeed them for medical reasons and despite everything that we can do to get them to breastfeed.

After having breast fed three babies after breast surgery and making it through challenges with each my last baby has presented the greatest challenge. Ben had trouble feeding since birth due to a bad start presented by a metabolic problem (hypercalcemia that made him very sleepy) as well as reflux. His feeding refusal has only become worse with time and he is now G-tube fed. Throughout all of his eleven months of struggle I have kept pumping, despite pressure from healthcare professionals to switch to formula, the challenges of rural life with a sick baby, multiple hospital admissions, and other children in tow. We are also introducing blended foods via tube the best we can to avoid transitioning to formula and to provide our baby with better nutrition. Despite all that I no longer get to be a breast feeding mom, which breaks my heart.

What is my identity as a mom now?

I know I am not able to breast feed this time but there are other moms like me that try to walk bravely thru these types of struggles so at least our babies can benefit from our milk.”

Every parent’s breastfeeding journey is unique. For some Dru’s challenges will seem familiar. For others the experiences they face will be very different. Breastfeeding as an act is not the definition of good parenting. It can be one part of being the kind of parent you envision yourself to be.

Breastmilk however definitely equals the gold standard in nutrition. In some families the baby will get breastmilk at the breast all of the time. For others baby will get breastmilk at the breast and via a cup or bottle and the frequency and timing between those feeding methods will vary. For others, like Dru, mum will pump all of her milk and the baby will get breastmilk via a cup or a bottle or a tube 100% of the time. Still others will provide as much breastmilk as they can and use artificial baby milk provide the rest of their child’s nutrients.

Every one of us has to define for ourselves what it means to breastfeed or breastmilk feed our baby and look within ourselves to decide if we have met our own goals. As mothers who are friends, sisters and community members interacting with other women we need to remember that our definition of what makes us a breastfeeding mother or a breastmilk feeding mother is unique and cannot and should not be applied to others.

Celebrate every drop of breastmilk that a baby gets and celebrate the efforts every mother makes to provide that milk whether you are thinking of yourself or someone else. If you meet someone who is not a breastfeeding mother or breastmilk feeding parent respect that this decision was based on factors you will never know or understand.

Celebrate with all parents the joy we get from being mothers and fathers.