

The History of LLL Philosophy

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Every mother has a personal philosophy—an approach to life, a collection of her most basic beliefs. This foundation informs and supports her choices and is constantly refined (strengthened or adapted) according to her experience. When a mother's personal philosophy correlates well with LLL philosophy, she may be interested in representing LLL through leadership. As mothers, we find the 10 concepts an integral part of our lives. As Leaders we present and represent them at Series Meetings, in one-to-one helping, and as part of preapplication dialogue. Leaders make LLL philosophy available to support a mother's breastfeeding and parenting choices in a practical and workable way. While each Leader lives out LLL philosophy in her own unique way, that philosophy has unified women around the world for nearly 50 years! Have you ever wondered where this philosophy came from?

From the early days of La Leche League, the Founders offered more than breastfeeding information and support. Their belief that babies need close and frequent contact with their mothers supported the breastfeeding information they presented. This philosophy contradicted the perceived wisdom of the era, which was that babies needed to be left alone to develop independence and that parents should avoid "spoiling" them by allowing them to "cry it out." In the early years, LLL philosophy was undefined and mainly transmitted verbally. In 1958, the Founders, Dr. Gregory White, and Dr. Herbert Ratner had a discussion about the purpose of the organization. During the conversation, the Founders came to realize that their approach to breastfeeding was a part of something much larger and far-reaching. And so, the purpose of LLL became to "Help mothers successfully breastfeed their babies, and so successfully mother them" (Cahill 2001).

During those early years, many women requested and received permission to start Groups in their own areas. "We'd hear from these women from far away who said they wanted to join us, and we'd write back and say, 'Fine. Set up your own organization because we're not going to have a big organizational structure,'" shares Betty Wagner in *The Love Story*. During that time, LLL was growing and spreading rapidly. Gradually, however, it began to filter back to the Founders that the purpose and (still undefined) philosophy were not being presented consistently everywhere. New Group Chairmen were appointed to administer Leader applications in the late 1960s in an attempt to minimize discrepancies in philosophy. In practice, it was felt that New Group Chairmen used individual interpretations of LLL philosophy to determine who could be a Leader; a woman accredited in one state might not have been accredited in another.

This imprecise sharing of LLL philosophy caused a good deal of concern among the Founders and the LLLI Committee, which served as a liaison between the local areas and the LLLI Executive Board (a forerunner of the Board of Directors). Mary Ann Byntar, Rita Gorski, and Rosann Miller, members of the LLLI Committee, requested permission from the Executive

Board to "clarify and define LLL philosophy." In 1972, the trio began developing the "Guidelines to League Philosophy" (Lowman 1978).

Mary Ann, Rita, and Rosann met frequently over the course of the next several months. The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding was the "official source of La Leche League policy and philosophy" (Lowman 1978) and they analyzed all the philosophy they found in it. Gradually, they whittled it down to eight categories. The Executive Board was then presented with a paragraph describing each of them and, in September 1972, the eight concepts, as they became known, were formally adopted. A year later a ninth, relating to the baby's need for his mother, was added. Two years later a 10th concept on discipline was also adopted.

Further refinements have been made over the years because of experiences in applying the concepts as guidelines for Leader accreditation. In 1975, the concepts about starting solids and loving guidance were revised, with the latter being revised again in 1981. Mary Gisch, LAD Director at the time, wrote the following when the change to the loving guidance concept was announced: "An understanding of the stages of normal development forms the basis for the new wording of this concept...The previous wording of this concept included the word 'discipline' and it seemed to many of us that using that word gave the wrong emphasis to the concept. In order to lovingly guide our children's behavior, we must understand why children behave as they do and what to expect from them at various stages of their development" (Gisch 1981). The concept relating to the baby's need for his mother's presence was revised in 1979. Betty Ann Countryman and Jody Nathanson, who were members of the Board of Directors at the time, said, "Simply stated yet complete, this concept speaks to the need of the baby. More clearly than before, the Board believes that this wording puts the League's emphasis where it was always meant to be...It has always recognized the unique and essential character of the baby's need for his mother. And now-unequivocally stated-we reaffirm this enduring belief." (LEAVEN 1979). The wording of the fathering concept was altered in 1985 to better describe the father's unique role as distinct from the mother's role. These refinements have given us the La Leche League philosophy we have today.

Since these statements of philosophy come from THE WOMANLY ART OF BREASTFEEDING, which also contains many mothers' experiences, they are relevant and practical in a variety of cultures and societies. They define where LLL stands on aspects of breastfeeding and mothering as well as form a significant and integral part of LLL's essence along with LLL's purpose and mission statement. LLL philosophy provides a framework within which Leaders give information and support in group and one-to-one situations. This framework is part of what makes our organization unique. With LLL philosophy described in clear, positive, and practical terms, Leaders have workable concepts to support their breastfeeding and mothering choices.

References

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