

Observation form: Children's centres

Name of children's centre

Criteria	Yes	No	Comment
General observations			
Adequate directions / accessibility			
Warm welcome			
Staff friendly and inclusive			
Welcome for breastfeeding			
Sign			
Private area if required			
Comfortable facilities			
Posters and displays			
Accurate / effective / proportionate info on breastfeeding and solid foods			
Accurate / effective / proportionate info on responsive parenting and very early child development			
Notices signposting parents to local services which support parenting / responsiveness and appropriate infant feeding practices			
The Code			
Full compliance - no advertising for breastmilk substitutes, bottles, teats or dummies anywhere in the service			
Groups and classes (if held in the centre)			
New mothers / parents welcomed			
Informations provided is accurate and effective			
Communication is sensitive and non-judgemental			
Interaction between helpers and mothers is appropriate and helpers are attuned to mothers' needs			
Follow-up support offered if mother is struggling			

Observation form: Children's Centres

Guide to using the children's centre observation form

This form is designed to allow you to audit the environment within each children's centre as experienced by visiting mothers / parents. The aim is to support the children's centres to make their physical space and staff supportive of, and compatible with, the Baby Friendly standards. Auditors will need to check that the premises, information boards and displays are used to best advantage. They will also need to spend time observing how mothers / parents experience the centre.

General observations

To achieve a positive score, the children's centre should be accessible for parents. They need to know how to get there, be able to access the building easily and feel welcome and included on arrival. The auditor can observe much of this through her own experience of accessing the centre and by what happens when parents arrive.

For example, was there adequate signage to find the centre? Was it obvious how to get into the building? Did the receptionist welcome and guide people to where they needed to be or who they needed to see? Did a staff member / helper arrive promptly and offer a warm welcome, appropriate information, etc?

Welcome for breastfeeding

It is important that breastfeeding mothers feel supported and safe when visiting the children's centre. There should be a sign that specifically welcomes them to feed wherever they choose and a private place to feed their baby or express milk if that's what they would prefer. There should also be access to a comfortable chair when needed. All staff should exhibit support for breastfeeding.

Posters and displays

These can provide parents, staff and visitors with useful information and also help normalise the Baby Friendly standards in the local community. However, to achieve this they need to be:

- **Accurate** – the information needs to be evidence based and in line with the Baby Friendly standards
- **Effective** – easy to understand, attractive to look at, accessible in terms of where it is displayed and how easy it is to view / read.
- **Proportionate** – the information provided should be neither too much, or too little, to be effective. For example, a centre that is covered in extensive displays on breastfeeding could feel threatening and pressurising to mothers. However, one small poster hidden amongst many others is unlikely to have any effect in normalising breastfeeding.

Information that promotes the classes, groups and other services available to support the implementation of the standards should be available, current and effective.

The International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes

All Baby Friendly accredited facilities are required to implement the Code. This means that there should be no materials provided by manufacturers of breastmilk substitutes, bottle, teats or dummies. Such material could include posters, leaflets, branded notepads, pens etc. The observation should include ensuring that no such material is available.

Note – This requirement does not mean that the children’s centre cannot provide bottle feeding parents with information and support. It is only intended to prevent the centres being used as a conduit for advertising to parents. It is suggested that Department of Health, UNICEF or locally produced materials on bottle feeding be given to parents on a needs basis, rather than stacked in leaflet racks for all visitors to take indiscriminately.

Groups and classes

Groups and classes are intended to provide:

- information / education
- social support
- help with problems.

Sometimes they are intended to fulfil more than one of these purposes. Before making an observation, ensure that you know what the intended purpose is and then consider whether it fulfils this. For example, a group that is intended to provide social support as well as help with breastfeeding problems will only be fulfilling this purpose if mothers feel comfortable coming when they don’t have any specific problems and if there is somewhere comfortable for mothers to gather and chat.

Welcome – Consider if someone greets new arrivals and welcomes them in, if there are enough comfortable places to sit, if the physical environment encourages interaction and relaxation.

Information – Whether the information provided is in the form of a taught class or via one to one or small group discussion or just via leaflets and handouts for parents to pick up, it is important that it is evidence-based and in line with the Baby Friendly standards. It also needs to help fulfil the stated objectives of the class or group and be delivered in a way that is likely to be effective. For example, if there is a breastfeeding support group run in the centre with the objective of facilitating peer to peer support, it may be appropriate for the helpers to answer questions and join in discussions to provide accurate information. Providing handouts and leaflets may also be appropriate. The auditors would use the observation to confirm if the information provided was accurate and tick yes on the form if it was. However, using the group to deliver a more formal lecture on a topic decided by the helper or centre staff could undermine the peer support element of the group and may not be effective if the mothers were not expecting this and did not wish to listen. In that case, the auditor may decide that the information provided was not effective and so tick no.

Communication and interaction – The helpers in the group or teachers in class should be first taking steps to actively listen to and find out about the concerns and needs of the mothers. They should then accept those concerns and be non-judgemental in their responses. New information offered should be accurate and also appropriate to the needs and concerns of the mothers.

Follow-up – If mothers are having difficulties, these should be addressed as appropriate to the skills and knowledge of the helpers in the room, but also arrangements made for follow-up when necessary to ensure that issues are resolved and mother and baby are safe. This could be in the form of a telephone call, home visit, referral to health visitor or GP etc.