

A Gift for You and Me!

A K to 3 Teacher Guide to Breastfeeding, Infant Health and Family Support

A Gift for You and Me! is a children's storybook and parent guide by Michelle LeDrew, RN, MN. Through rhyme, family interactions and colourful illustrations, the book introduces children to breastfeeding as an everyday experience and important part of infant health and development.

The story also provides opportunities to explore how babies communicate, skin-to-skin contact, safe sleep, normal infant crying, family support, responsive caregiving and knowing when and where to seek help.

This guide provides age appropriate ideas for using the story and accompanying free resources to support health learning from Kindergarten (primary) to Grade 3.

Why Introduce Breastfeeding in K to 3?

Children begin developing ideas about babies, families, bodies and health from an early age. Seeing breastfeeding represented as part of everyday family life helps children understand what breastfeeding is and provides a foundation for health learning and informed decision making later in life.

Age appropriate breastfeeding education can help children:

- Recognize breastfeeding as an everyday experience of how babies are nourished and cared for
- Understand that breastfeeding supports the health of babies and mothers
- Develop positive and accurate knowledge about breastfeeding
- Begin developing health literacy and informed decision making skills
- Understand that good health decisions are supported by accurate information
- Recognize the important role of families, communities, peer support and health care providers in supporting parents and babies

Before You Begin: Our Experiences Influence How We Teach

Breastfeeding and infant feeding can be personal topics. Teachers, like parents and families, bring their own experiences, beliefs and feelings to conversations about how babies are fed and cared for.

Before introducing the topic, it can be helpful to consider how personal experiences may influence the language used, questions asked or messages emphasized.

The purpose of breastfeeding education is not to evaluate past feeding decisions or individual family experiences. It is to provide children with accurate, age appropriate health information while creating a classroom where different family experiences are treated with respect.

Children should not be asked to compare or defend how they or their siblings were fed.

A helpful principle for classroom discussion is:

We can learn what the evidence tells us about health while treating every person and family with dignity and respect.

About the Book

A Gift for You and Me! follows a young child as they learn about babies and the many ways families help babies and parents feel safe, supported and cared for.

Breastfeeding is woven naturally throughout the story rather than presented as a separate lesson. The accompanying parent guidance expands on the health messages introduced through the rhyme and illustrations.

The book explores:

- Breastfeeding and health
- Skin-to-skin contact
- How babies communicate hunger and other needs
- Responsive, cue-based feeding
- Keeping babies close, including room sharing and safe sleep
- Normal infant crying and responding safely
- Family support for new parents
- Breastfeeding and parenting support
- The role of health care providers and peer support
- Bonding, closeness and responsive caregiving
- Reliable health information and informed decision making

Pebble the Puffin appears throughout the book and accompanying activities, providing an engaging character for younger children and opportunities for additional literacy, art and science learning.

Key Health Concepts

1. Breastfeeding and Health

Breastmilk provides nutrition specifically suited to babies and contains components that support growth, development and immune protection. Breastfeeding also has important health benefits for mothers.

K to Grade 1

Keep the message simple:

Babies need milk to grow. Birthing parents/mothers make milk for their babies. When a baby drinks milk from their mother's breast, it is called breastfeeding.

Ask:

- What do babies need to grow?
- What is breastfeeding?
- What do you notice about the parent and baby in the picture?
- What helps the baby feel close and safe?

Grades 2 to 3

Begin connecting breastfeeding with health literacy:

- How does breastfeeding help babies?
- Why is learning about health important?
- Where can families find health information that they can trust?
- Who can help parents when they have questions about breastfeeding or their baby's health?

An important early health literacy message is:

Good health decisions start with good information and the right supports around us.

2. Babies Communicate Through Cues

Babies communicate long before they can speak. Movements, facial expressions, sounds and behaviours can tell caregivers that a baby is hungry, tired, uncomfortable or seeking closeness.

Recognizing and responding to these cues is part of responsive caregiving. Feeding in response to a baby's hunger cues is known as cue based or responsive feeding.

Ask:

- How can a baby communicate without words?
- What might a baby do when beginning to get hungry?

- Why is it helpful to notice early signs of hunger rather than waiting until a baby is crying?
- What else might a baby be trying to tell us?

Classroom activity: Use the baby cue activity sheets or create a class chart called **How Babies Talk Without Words**.

3. Skin-to-Skin Contact

Skin-to-skin contact means placing a baby, wearing only a diaper, directly against a parent's bare chest.

Skin-to-skin contact helps babies stay warm and calm, supports early feeding and provides comfort and closeness.

For younger children:

Being close can help babies feel safe, warm and calm.

Older children can explore how comforting touch can help babies during stressful or painful experiences. Skin-to-skin contact can also provide comfort during some health care procedures, such as receiving a needle.

Ask:

- Why might being close to a parent help a baby?
- What are some ways people comfort one another?
- Why is comfort especially important when someone is frightened or experiencing something painful?

4. Keeping Babies Close and Sleeping Safely

Babies need closeness and a safe place to sleep.

Young babies benefit from sleeping in the same room as their parent or caregiver, while having their own safe sleep space.

For younger children:

Babies need a safe place to sleep, close to the adults who care for them.

With older children, explore:

- Why might it be helpful for a young baby to sleep near a parent?
- Why do babies need adults nearby?

- What helps make a baby's sleep space safe?

Rather than asking children to describe sleep practices in their own homes, teachers can focus on current health and safety recommendations.

5. Crying Is Normal and Babies Need a Safe Response

All babies cry. Crying is one of the ways babies communicate.

Sometimes caregivers can identify what a baby needs and help them settle. At other times, a baby may continue crying even after being fed, changed, held and comforted.

A simple but important safety message is:

A baby should never be shaken.

For younger children:

Babies cry to tell us something. They need adults to respond gently and safely.

Older children can explore:

- Why do babies cry?
- Why can caring for a crying baby sometimes be difficult?
- What can an adult do if they begin to feel frustrated or overwhelmed?
- Who can they ask for help?

Children can learn that asking someone for help when feeling overwhelmed is a safe and responsible thing to do.

6. Families Help New Parents

Caring for a new baby is not something parents need to do alone.

Partners, grandparents, siblings, extended family and friends can provide practical and emotional support. Supporting parents can also support breastfeeding and the health and wellbeing of the baby.

Ask children to find examples of helping in the story:

- What are family members doing to help?
- Does helping with a baby always mean feeding the baby?
- What other things need to be done when there is a new baby?
- How does helping a parent also help the baby?

Classroom activity: Create a chart called **How Can We Help a Family With a New Baby?**

Children might suggest preparing food, helping with household tasks, spending time with older children, listening, offering encouragement or helping parents find support.

7. Asking for Help Is Part of Caring

Breastfeeding and caring for a baby are learned experiences. New parents often have questions, and timely support can make a difference.

Support may come from:

- Partners, family and friends
- Other parents and peer support groups
- Nurses and lactation consultants
- Doctors and other health care providers
- Community programs and services

Ask:

- Who helps us when we are learning something new?
- Why is asking for help a useful health skill?
- Who could a parent talk to if they were worried about their baby?
- When might someone need advice from a health care provider rather than a friend?

This introduces children to an important health literacy skill: **knowing when and where to seek help.**

Using the Book in the Classroom

The book does not need to be used as a single lesson. Teachers can select health concepts and activities appropriate to the age of their students and the curriculum being taught.

Before Reading

Begin with a few simple questions:

- What do babies need to grow and be healthy?
- How do babies tell us what they need?
- What are some ways families care for babies?
- Who helps parents learn how to care for a new baby?

For Grades 2 to 3, consider adding:

- Where can families get trustworthy health information?
- Why is it important to ask for help when we need it?

Children can contribute ideas without being required to share personal family experiences.

While Reading

Choose illustrations that reinforce the health concept being explored.

Possible prompts include:

- What is the baby communicating?
- What is happening during the feeding?
- What is helping the baby feel safe and comfortable?
- How is the family supporting the parent and baby?
- What health message do you notice?
- Who could this family ask for help?
- Can you find Pebble the Puffin?

Different readings of the book can focus on different health concepts.

After Reading

Choose one activity that reinforces the learning.

Examples include:

What Do Babies Need?

Create a class chart about nourishment, warmth, safe sleep, comfort, closeness, health care and responsive adults.

How Babies Talk Without Words

Use illustrations or activity sheets to identify feeding and other baby cues.

Helping a New Family

Identify the different people who can support a baby by supporting the baby's parents.

Where Do We Go for Help?

Explore different sources of support, from family and peers to community programs and health care providers.

Informed Decision Making and Respect

Learning about breastfeeding provides an opportunity to introduce children to a broader principle of health education: people need accurate information and appropriate support to make informed health decisions.

Breastfeeding has significant health benefits and commercial infant formula should not be presented as an equivalent feeding option from a health perspective. At the same time, families may use commercial infant formula for medical or personal reasons. Children should never be encouraged to judge a family based on how a baby is fed.

Teachers can reinforce a simple principle:

We can provide accurate information about health while respecting that every family's circumstances are different.

Curriculum Connections

The primary curriculum connection for *A Gift for You and Me!* is **Health**, including:

- Breastfeeding and health
- Health literacy and informed decision making
- Infant cues and responsive caregiving
- Skin-to-skin contact
- Safe sleep and room sharing
- Normal infant crying and safe responses
- Family and community support
- Help seeking
- Healthy relationships and emotional wellbeing

The story can also support learning across other subject areas.

English Language Arts: sequencing, vocabulary, discussion, comprehension, health messages, writing and rhyme.

Science: human growth and development, needs of living things, Atlantic puffins and how animals care for their young.

Visual Arts: illustration, colouring, health posters and creative responses to the story.

Mathematics: counting, sorting, sequencing and patterning using accompanying activities.

Free Classroom Resources

Free printable resources accompanying *A Gift for You and Me!* are available for classroom and educational use, including:

- Colouring sheets
- Baby hunger cue activities
- Patterning activities
- Welcome baby cards
- Family helping activities
- Drawing and writing prompts
- Literacy activities
- Pebble the Puffin activities
- Additional K to 3 health worksheets

Teachers can select individual resources based on student age, learning needs and curriculum outcomes.

Curriculum Alignment

A Gift for You and Me! and its accompanying resources are particularly suited to K to 3 learning related to health, healthy relationships, health literacy, informed decision making, family support and responsive caregiving.

About the Author

Michelle LeDrew, RN, MN is a registered nurse and maternal child health professional with more than three decades of experience supporting mothers, babies, families and health care providers.

She created *A Gift for You and Me!* to help children and families see breastfeeding as a normal part of everyday life while sharing evidence informed information about breastfeeding, infant health, bonding, responsive caregiving and family support.

Learn More and Access Free Resources

Visit michelleledrew.ca/babygift for information about *A Gift for You and Me!*, free colouring and activity sheets, and additional resources for families and educators.