

Health Care Provider Guide

Using *A Gift for You and Me!* in Prenatal Group Classes and One-to-One Teaching

Purpose of this Guide

A Gift for You and Me! is a children's storybook and parent guide about breastfeeding, bonding and growing together. It can also be used by health care providers as a conversation-based teaching resource during pregnancy.

This guide provides practical suggestions for incorporating the book and accompanying free resources into:

- prenatal group classes
- one-to-one prenatal teaching
- breastfeeding education
- family preparation for a new baby
- conversations with partners, grandparents and other support people

The goal is not necessarily to read the entire book during a prenatal session. Selected pages, illustrations and parent guidance can be used to introduce discussion, reinforce key messages and help families connect information about breastfeeding and infant care with everyday life after their baby arrives.

Why Use the Book During Pregnancy?

Pregnancy provides an important opportunity to prepare families not only for feeding their baby, but also for the relationships and caregiving experiences that begin after birth.

A Gift for You and Me! provides a visual and story-based way to explore:

- breastfeeding and responsive feeding
- skin-to-skin contact
- learning and responding to infant feeding cues
- establishing breastfeeding (with clinically accurate positioning and latch illustrations)
- keeping parents and babies together
- bonding and connection
- infant crying and comforting
- infant sleep and room sharing
- caregiver and infant co-regulation
- partner and family support
- when and where to seek help

The illustrations and story can make these concepts easier to discuss than information presented only through slides or written teaching materials.

Use the following free Infographics and Teaching Sheets to supplement the learning from A Gift for You and Me! The infographics can be printed and displayed in your teaching room. The activity sheets can be done during the teaching session or take home to be shared with partners and other caregivers.

Infographics:

Skin-to-skin at Birth

Understanding Infant Feeding Cues

Signs your Baby is Getting Enough

Newborn Sleep

Expressing Milk

Breastfeeding Supplementation

Supporting Breastfeeding as a Family

Activity Sheets:

Why Breastfeeding Matters to Me

Partners Make a Big Difference

Families Help New Parents

A Relationship Based Approach to Prenatal Education

The book encourages families to think about feeding and infant care within the context of relationships.

Rather than focusing only on questions such as:

How often should my baby feed?

the health care provider can also explore:

How will I know my baby wants to feed?

What might my baby be communicating to me?

What can I do to help my baby feel calm and safe?

How can my partner or family support us?

Who can I contact if feeding or caring for my baby becomes difficult?

This approach helps families begin to recognize babies as active participants who communicate through cues, behaviours, movement, facial expressions and crying.

Key Prenatal Teaching Opportunities

Why breastfeeding matters (add a section here)

1. Preparing to Breastfeed

Use the story to introduce breastfeeding as something families can begin learning about before their baby is born.

Discuss:

- the importance of learning about breastfeeding during pregnancy
- realistic expectations about the early days
- how breastfeeding is learned by both the breastfeeding parent and baby
- the importance of skilled support when challenges arise
- identifying breastfeeding and community supports before birth

Conversation starter

“What have you heard about breastfeeding from family, friends or other sources?”

This can help the provider identify previous experiences, expectations, concerns and misinformation without making assumptions about the family's feeding plans.

2. Skin to Skin Contact

Use illustrations or parent guidance showing closeness between baby and caregiver to discuss immediate and ongoing skin-to-skin contact.

Explore how skin to skin contact can support:

- transition after birth
- temperature regulation
- early feeding behaviours
- recognition of feeding cues
- calming and regulation
- closeness and connection

Reinforce that skin-to-skin contact is valuable beyond the first feeding or first hours after birth and can also be provided by partners and other caregivers when appropriate.

3. Learning Baby's Feeding Cues

Use the book to introduce responsive, cue-based feeding.

Help families recognize early feeding cues such as:

- stirring or increased movement
- bringing hands toward the mouth
- opening the mouth
- turning or searching with the mouth
- increasing alertness

Discuss crying as a later feeding cue and encourage families to respond to earlier cues when possible.

Teaching activity

Show an illustration of the baby and ask:

“What do you notice about this baby?”

“What might the baby be communicating?”

This shifts learning from memorizing a list of cues to observing and interpreting infant behaviour.

4. Responsive Feeding

Explain that feeding is both nutritional and relational.

Responsive feeding involves noticing the baby's cues, responding to hunger and satiety, providing closeness and allowing the baby to participate actively in feeding.

Breastfeeding naturally provides many opportunities for close physical contact and responsive interaction. The underlying principles of responsive caregiving remain important for families whose babies receive expressed breastmilk, donor milk or infant formula.

Encourage families to watch the baby rather than relying only on the clock.

5. Keeping Parent and Baby Together

Discuss the value of keeping babies close to their parents.

Keeping parent and baby together supports opportunities for:

- skin-to-skin contact
- frequent feeding
- recognizing early feeding cues
- learning the baby's behaviours
- responding promptly to needs
- developing confidence in caring for the baby

This can also introduce discussion about what families may expect in their birth setting.

6. Breastfeeding Is Learned

Use the book to normalize the fact that breastfeeding is a skill that develops with practice, time and support.

Families can benefit from knowing before birth that needing assistance does not necessarily mean breastfeeding is failing.

Discuss:

- positioning and attachment
- signs that feeding is going well
- normal feeding patterns
- where to obtain skilled breastfeeding assistance
- when to seek additional assessment

Avoid creating an expectation that breastfeeding should be immediately effortless.

7. Crying Is Communication

The book can help introduce crying as one of the ways babies communicate.

Discuss how caregivers can respond through:

- holding
- feeding when appropriate
- skin-to-skin contact
- talking or singing
- movement
- reducing stimulation
- checking for discomfort or other needs

Explain that babies rely on caregivers for co-regulation. They are not expected to manage intense emotions or distress independently.

Important safety message

Persistent crying can be extremely stressful.

Encourage families to plan before birth for what they will do if they become overwhelmed.

A caregiver can place the baby safely in an appropriate sleep space, take a short break, ask another trusted adult for help and seek professional assistance when needed.

Never shake a baby.

Consider asking:

“Who could you call if you were exhausted or finding your baby's crying difficult to manage?”

8. Infant Sleep and Nighttime Care

Use the book's sleep information to introduce safe and responsive nighttime care.

Discuss current safe sleep recommendations, including appropriate sleep surfaces and room sharing.

Keeping the baby nearby can also help caregivers recognize and respond to feeding and other cues during the night.

Emphasize that infant sleep patterns differ considerably from adult sleep and change throughout infancy.

Providers should supplement the book with current national, provincial, territorial or local safe sleep guidance.

9. Partners and Family Have an Important Role

One of the strengths of *A Gift for You and Me!* is that breastfeeding and infant care are shown within a family and community.

Ask partners and support people:

“What are some ways you can support feeding without being the person who breastfeeds?”

Possible responses include:

- bringing the baby to the breastfeeding parent
- helping with skin to skin contact
- preparing food and drinks
- taking responsibility for household tasks
- caring for older children
- protecting opportunities for rest
- learning infant cues

- offering encouragement
- helping locate professional support when needed

Share the activity sheets on

This helps shift the conversation from “**How can someone else feed the baby?**” to “**How can everyone participate in caring for the baby and supporting feeding?**”

10. Supporting the Caregiver Supports the Baby

Introduce the idea that babies develop within relationships and that caregiver well being matters.

Encourage families to think about:

- practical help after birth
- opportunities for rest
- emotional support
- realistic expectations
- sharing responsibilities
- recognizing when additional help is needed

Prenatal planning can help families establish their support network before they are tired or experiencing difficulties.

Suggested Group Class Activity

Meet the Baby Through the Story

Time: approximately 10 to 15 minutes

Choose several illustrations or short sections from *A Gift for You and Me!* that show feeding, skin to skin contact, crying, sleeping or family support.

Rather than immediately explaining the teaching point, invite participants to observe the picture.

Ask:

What do you notice?

What might the baby be communicating?

How is the caregiver responding?

What might help this family?

How could a partner or family member support them?

Follow the discussion with the relevant information from the parent guidance and your local clinical or public health resources.

This activity can help participants practise observing infant behaviour and thinking relationally about infant care.

Suggested One to One Teaching

The book can also be used during individual prenatal appointments.

Rather than covering every topic, select pages based on the family's questions and circumstances.

For example:

“You mentioned being worried about knowing when your baby is hungry. Let's look at this page together.”

or

“You were asking what your partner can do to help with breastfeeding. This part of the story gives us a good place to start that conversation.”

The book can remain open between the provider and family, making the interaction conversational rather than lecture based.

Before the Family Leaves

Encourage families to identify:

Feeding support

Who will they contact if breastfeeding is painful, the baby is having difficulty feeding or they are worried about milk production?

Practical support

Who can help with meals, household responsibilities, older children or other everyday needs?

Emotional support

Who can they talk to when they are tired, worried or overwhelmed?

Infant crying support

Who can take over briefly if crying becomes difficult to manage?

Local resources

Where can they access breastfeeding, public health, primary care, mental health, parenting and emergency services?

Whenever possible, provide families with specific **local resources and contact information**, rather than simply advising them to seek help.

Using the Accompanying Resources

Additional free resources accompanying *A Gift for You and Me!* can be used to extend prenatal education beyond the book.

Health care providers can:

- share relevant parent resources before or after a class
- provide QR or website access for families to explore at home
- use individual resources to reinforce class discussions
- direct families to local breastfeeding and parenting supports
- incorporate selected materials into prenatal programs
- share resources with partners, grandparents and other support people

Resources can be accessed at:

michelleledrew.ca/babygift

Practice Considerations

A Gift for You and Me! is an educational resource and does not replace individualized clinical assessment, professional judgement or current clinical guidance.

Health care providers should:

- use current national and local recommendations
- provide individualized care when concerns arise
- avoid assumptions about family structure, feeding decisions or circumstances
- acknowledge families' previous experiences and cultural contexts
- provide evidence informed information in a respectful and non judgemental manner
- connect families with appropriate local services and supports

When feeding plans change or supplementation is medically indicated, families continue to benefit from responsive feeding, skin to skin contact, closeness, cue recognition and supportive relationships.

Connection With the Baby Friendly Initiative

The book and accompanying resources can complement prenatal education consistent with the Baby Friendly Initiative, particularly education related to:

- the importance and management of breastfeeding
- skin to skin contact
- keeping parents and babies together
- responsive, cue based feeding
- supporting families to establish and maintain breastfeeding
- avoiding unnecessary supplementation
- ensuring families know where to obtain ongoing support

The resource can help translate these principles from clinical recommendations into everyday family experiences.

Take Home Message for Families

Your baby will communicate with you from the very beginning.

Learning to notice and respond to your baby's cues is part of learning about each other.

Feeding, holding, comforting, skin to skin contact, talking, sleeping nearby and simply spending time together provide repeated opportunities for connection.

You do not have to know everything before your baby arrives. Prepare by learning what you can, identifying the people who will support you and knowing where to turn if you need help.

The relationship grows as you and your baby grow together.

About the Resource

A Gift for You and Me!

A children's storybook and parent guide about breastfeeding, bonding, and growing together

Michelle LeDrew, RN, MN

More than 33 years of experience in maternal and child health.

Book information and free resources for families, health care professionals, educators and community programs:

michelleledrew.ca/babygift

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