

# BLACK DADS SUPPORTING BREASTFEEDING IN CONNECTICUT

## Background

Black mothers in Connecticut breastfeed at lower rates than other racial/ethnic groups. (1) CARE held listening sessions in 2020 to understand how social, structural, and historical barriers impact Black moms' breastfeeding rates in New Haven. (2) One breastfeeding determinant that provoked further interest is the father. Past research suggests that strong social support networks, including the infant's father, promotes successful breastfeeding. (3) Despite evidence that the dad's support encourages breastfeeding, little was known about dads' understanding of their role in feeding or their experiences while doing so. Dads' perspectives on barriers and facilitators to breastfeeding can help us better support Connecticut families and reduce racial/ethnic inequities.



## OUR WORK WITH PARTNERS

To understand dads' experiences with breastfeeding, CARE partnered with New Haven Healthy Start and Real Dads Forever to recruit for and conduct listening sessions. These group sessions asked Black dads from Connecticut about their role in breastfeeding and about breastfeeding support services (like maternity-hospital care, WIC, and lactation specialists).

## Summary of Findings

### Challenges

### Aids

- Stigma against breastfeeding in public
- Sexualization of breastfeeding

### Community and Policy

- Breastfeeding is visible in media
- Breastfeeding-friendly workplace policies
- Dedicated rooms for breastfeeding in public spaces

- Insufficient breastfeeding preparation and promotion
- Lack of access to resources
- Insufficient discharge support from the maternity hospital

### Institutional

- Dad is included in breastfeeding education
- Ongoing breastfeeding support is provided to parents before and after the child is born

- Family discouragement from breastfeeding

### Interpersonal

- Breastfeeding decisions are shared by parents
- Generational breastfeeding and family support

- Dad has low breastfeeding knowledge or unsure of his role
- Dad takes a hands-off approach to feeding

### Individual

- Dad is directly engaged with the feeding of his infant
- Dad alleviates household duties
- Dad understands benefits of breastfeeding



## Here's what dads said about some barriers to breastfeeding:



[My wife] had trouble breastfeeding, so she kind of felt, she felt like something was wrong with her. But, really what it was, was that no one ever properly showed her how to get the milk out. You've got to do it a certain way.



People are sexualizing breastfeeding trying to turn it into something that its not.

## Here's what dads said about improving breastfeeding support:

"The more information we got, the better we felt, and the more equipped we were to make our decision."



Dads felt more comfortable with breastfeeding when they had plenty of information. Parenting classes, community groups, and hospital-based education can provide information about breastfeeding benefits, techniques, and available resources to both mom and dad.

"[The hospital] gave me different ways of how I can help relieve the tension [in the breast], the pressure that all of that causes... because our son stopped breastfeeding himself... So, trying to help with that, and different things like that. And yeah, support just emotionally and everything too."



Some dads were unsure what their role could or should be in breastfeeding. Education specifically focused on the dads' role in breastfeeding helped clarify responsibilities for the dads. These responsibilities included bottle-feeding overnight, relieving breast pain, alleviating the burden of household duties, and being an emotional support for the mom.

"We had a tough time knowing when to wean the baby off, that period of time was like murky... So having more guidance in that area would help too."



Parents had questions about breastfeeding after leaving maternity hospitals. Breastfeeding support should start during the prenatal period and extend into the postnatal period. Lactation counselors or community groups with whom parents have personal relationships were especially appreciated by dads.

"Something that could make it easier, you don't really see... my girl didn't even know what a mother's room was, no signs, nothing... explaining what a mother's room is."



Dads felt that breastfeeding was often stigmatized and sexualized, especially in public. Some of their ideas to achieve community acceptance of breastfeeding included increased displays of breastfeeding in media and dedicated breastfeeding rooms in public spaces.