



Interaction and relationships in breastfeeding families

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Brief biography

Dr. Epstein-Gilboa is a nurse psychotherapist, researcher in the field of psychology, author, university instructor, lactation consultant and childbirth educator. Her research focuses on the psychology of birth, breastfeeding, parenting and early childhood. Publications include a book (2009). *Interaction and Relationships in Breastfeeding Families: Implications for Practice*.

Abstract

The focus of this lecture is on interaction and relationships in families with children displaying physiologically based nursing patterns. This session will enable participants to support families better by gaining insights into the contribution of breastfeeding to family interaction, behaviours and attitudes.

A central concept of family systems theory is that causality is circular. This concept implies that interactions between mothers and breastfeeding babies will affect the entire family and vice versa. The lecture will discuss how sensitive interactions between nursing mothers and infants affects overall family interaction, and are influenced by systemic behaviours. Specific behaviours associated with nursing are displayed by the family, including open communication patterns and proximity behaviours. During the lecture the participants will learn about the different ways that families engage in proximity behaviours, including co-sleeping, and diverse types of child focused weaning from the breast, mother and home. Behaviours are upheld by and also stem from attitudes that are shared by the family. These attitudes include reverence for natural processes and respect for children's needs. Breastfeeding patterns, and associated attitudes and behaviours evolve over time. Specific behaviours change while family themes remain salient. The quality of interaction, communication patterns and attitudes originally established through breastfeeding remain significant aspects of family interchanges over time. The lecture will review phases of family development and stage appropriate counselling. Special conditions, such as prematurity, adoption and risks for relational difficulties will also be reviewed.

The lecture will describe findings from Dr. Epstein-Gilboa's study on breastfeeding families that are published in her book, *'Interactions and Relationships in Breastfeeding Families'*.