



How to become a lactation support provider

**A Guide for North Alabama from the
Alabama Cohosh Collaborative**



What is a lactation support provider and why are they important?



Lactation support provider (LSP) is an umbrella term for people who provide support, education, and assistance to people who are breastfeeding. Most

of the time, LSPs work with parents of newborns.

Anyone who's had a newborn knows the experience of feeding can be challenging and intense. Receiving support as you navigate these decisions and experiences can literally have lifelong impacts. LSPs are helpers, and they are an essential part of a support system for new parents.

Breast/chestfeeding takes a tremendous amount of time, energy, and skill, and people who choose to nurse deserve support from their families, communities, and professionals. LSPs also support families who choose to formula feed or use a combination of human milk and formula. Every family is different, and every parent should have the support and information they need to make the best decision for themselves and their children.



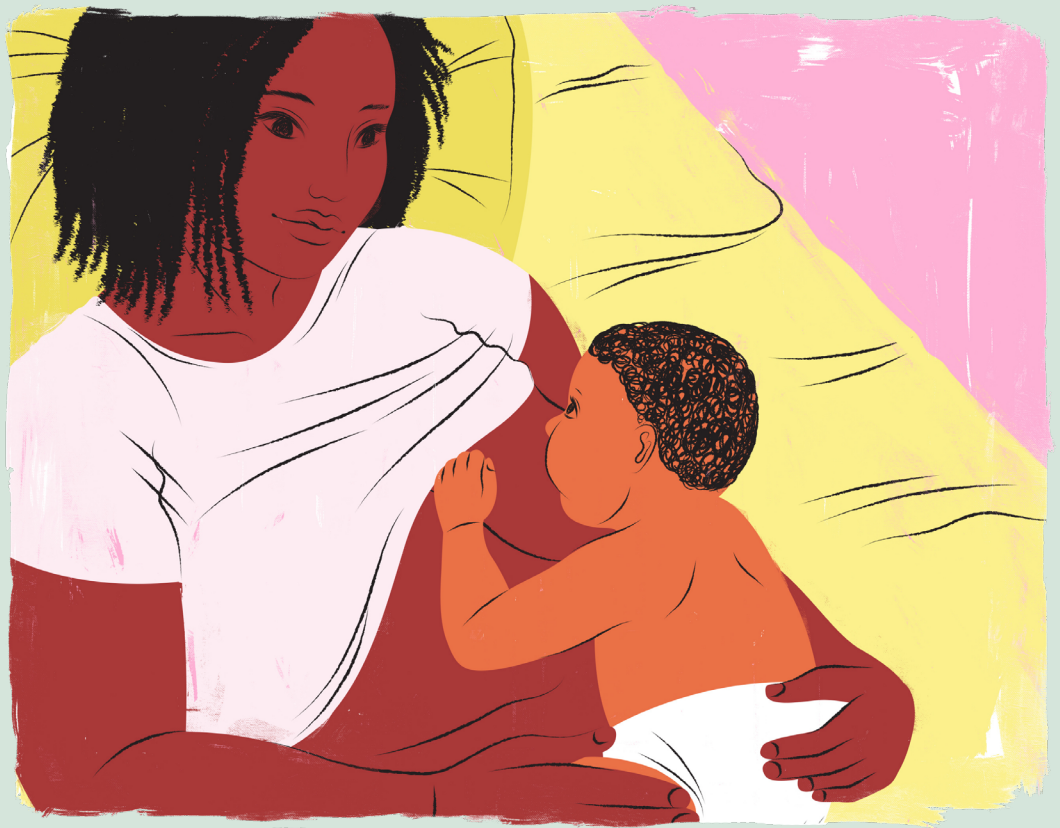
Cultural competency is essential to lactation support

Lactation is extremely vulnerable and personal, and each person's feeding choices and practices will be influenced by their own life experiences, circumstance, social context, and cultural beliefs. It's essential that anyone who is supporting lactating parents have the ability to understand, appreciate, and interact effectively with people from diverse cultures, beliefs, and backgrounds.

Language around Lactation

In talking about feeding newborns, we most often hear language around mothers and breastfeeding. BUT, not everyone who lactates identifies with that language. Some people may prefer to use “chest-feeding” or “nursing.” Some people prefer saying “human milk” rather than “breast milk.” Instead of mother or mom, sometimes it’s more accurate to refer to a “lactating parent” or “lactating person.” Not every person who is lactating uses the pronouns she and her.

We believe that language is important, and everyone should be described with the words that feel best to them. For this guide, we’ll use all these terms interchangeably.



Black breastfeeding is important!



For over 40 years in the United States, there has been a gaping racial disparity

in breastfeeding rates. Black mothers are among the least likely subpopulation to initiate breastfeeding. There are complex social and cultural factors that influence this trend; primarily relating to the traumatic history of racialized slavery and oppression. But the reasons are not only historical—there is a blatant lack of diversity in the field of breastfeeding advocacy today. This means that Black parents are often unable to get culturally competent

support, and are more likely to encounter bias, dismissiveness, and racism. Black LSPs are especially important and needed.

Some organizations offering support to black chestfeeders include:

- * Chocolate Milk Mommies
- * ROSE (Reaching Our Sisters Everywhere)
- * African American Breastfeeding Network Inc.
- * Chocolate Milk Cafe.

Black Breastfeeding Week is celebrated in August of every year.

What kind of certification do I need?



Lactation support comes from people with a range of experience and training—from people who are simply sharing wisdom from their own personal experiences to specialists who've spent thousands of hours studying and offering support. To create a thriving community of support for new parents, we need all kinds of lactation supporters.

However, the widespread and varied use of terms such as “counselor,” “specialist,” “educator,” and “consultant” can get confusing for everyone. As you consider what training and credentials will best equip you to offer lactation support, consider these questions:

- * Do you want to offer lactation support in a professional setting (like a hospital), on your own (taking appointments or offering home visits to new families) or in a community setting (in support groups)?
- * How much time do you want to spend on training?
- * How much money are you able to spend on training?
- * Do you want a one-time training/certification, or something that you will continue to maintain with continuing education and recertification?
- * Do you intend to make money providing lactation support or provide support for free? If you plan to charge for lactation support, do you have experience or training on how to run a business?
- * If you want to be hired by an institution, what requirements does that institution have for LSP positions?
- * Does the training include a requirement to complete supervised hours providing support? If so, how will you get those hours?
- * Do the values of the organization offering the training align with your personal values?

What content should I expect in a training course?

There are dozens (if not hundreds!) of different lactation support courses online. Because there is no standardization or regulation of lactation training, each organization decides for themselves what to include.

If you are considering pursuing an IBCLC in the future, you will want to consider a training program that includes 90 or more hours of coursework, which is the minimum requirement for lactation-specific education for IBCLC. Some trainings are specifically designed to be a stepping stone toward an IBCLC.

A comprehensive educational course will include some information on these topics:

- * The physiology of lactation
- * Anatomy relevant to lactation (both in the parent and the child)
- * Initiating and establishing milk supply
- * Common and complex challenges with lactation
- * Feeding a preterm infant
- * Drugs and toxins in human milk
- * Expressing human milk
- * Surgery and lactation
- * Cultural competency
- * Equipment and supplies for feeding
- * Ethics and professionalism related to lactation
- * Some training programs also provide you with the opportunity to gain some experience in working with clients, and/or the experience of being mentored by an experienced LSP.

Common titles for lactation support providers

Breastfeeding Peer Counselor

- * Peer counselors are usually individuals who have successfully nursed their own children and have received some training to support other breastfeeding parents. Most often, peer counselors offer services through community programs and are volunteers.
- * Organizations that offer peer counselor programs include WIC, the La Leche League, BLACK (*Birth, Lactation, Accomodation, Culture, Kinship*), ROSE (*Reaching Our Sisters Everywhere*),

Lactation Consultant (IBCLC)

- * International Board Certified Lactation Consultants (*IBCLCs*) are healthcare professionals with extensive training and certification in lactation management. They provide clinical support to mothers and babies, often working in hospitals, clinics, or private practice.
- * IBCLC is not a training program but requires completing specific education and clinical experience, and passing an exam.

Lactation Counselor or Breastfeeding Specialist

- * Lactation counselors and specialists are trained to provide lactation management and support to breastfeeding families. These trainings are more comprehensive than peer counselor trainings, but they are still considered basic training.
- * Some people with these certifications use them to set up a private practice – for example, offering home visits to new families. Because counselors and specialists are not clinicians, an independent practitioner would need to refer more complex cases to an IBCLC.
- * These credentials are often stepping stones toward an IBCLC certification, or “bonus” credentials for professionals like RNs, doulas, midwives, etc.
- * Most trainings to become a lactation counselor or specialists are offered online, cost between \$800-\$1500 and include 50-200 hours of training.
- * Some organizations that offer this training include Childbirth International (*CBI*), Lactation Education Resources (*LER*), Academy of Lactation Policy and Practice (*ALPP*),

Lactation or Breastfeeding Educator

- * Lactation Educators are trained to offer unbiased focused information, support, encouragement, guidance, referrals, and education to their communities, which includes families, the general public, reproductive care professionals, and medical staff.
- * Training for lactation educators typically prepares LEs to share information about lactation, including how to teach classes, give presentations, provide information to new parents and share educational resources with community members.
- * Some organizations that offer lactation educator training include CAPPA (*Childbirth and Postpartum Professional Association*), ProDoula, Madriella, Birthing Advocacy (*BADT*), BLACK (*Birth, Lactation, Accomodation, Culture, Kinship*),



Becoming an IBCLC



Most people who provide lactation support as a central component of their

profession have an IBCLC certification. Awarded by the International Board of Lactation Certification Examiners (IBLCE), this designation recognizes the education and experience of those who meet IBLCE's requirements. The IBLCE offers three certification pathways based on one's educational background.

To earn the IBCLC designation, candidates must:

- * Complete 90 hours of lactation-specific education within five years before the exam.
- * Accumulate 300-1000 clinical hours supporting lactation (varies by pathway).
- * Complete eight health science courses at an accredited institution (unless already a nurse, midwife, doctor, etc.).
- * Take six continuing education courses in health science topics (e.g., medical terminology, basic life support).
- * Finish at least five hours of communication skills training.
- * Pass the IBCLC exam (closed book, 175 multiple-choice questions).
- * IBCLCs must adhere to IBLCE's code of ethics and scope of practice and recertify every five years.

Can you make a living providing lactation support in Alabama?

In Alabama, most lactation support providers combine this work with roles like doula, midwife, dietitian, or nurse. While some may run private practices, it's uncommon. A career in lactation support is possible in healthcare settings like hospitals or birth centers as an IBCLC.

Completing clinical hours



Finding a hospital to complete clinical hours can be challenging if you're

not already employed there.

In the Huntsville area, Madison Hospital accepts interns enrolled in programs with Lactation Education Research (LER).

Hospitals with the Baby-Friendly designation are committed to supporting breastfeeding. The Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI), launched by WHO and UNICEF, promotes practices that protect and encourage breastfeeding.



Resources

- **IBCLE:** International Board of Lactation Consultant Examiners is an international credentialing body whose mission is to serve the global public interest by advancing professional practice in lactation consultation and support through credentialing.
 - **Lactation Education Resources:** LER has the most comprehensive, up-to-date online catalog of lactation courses available, bringing together the knowledge of highly experienced and cutting-edge instructors from around the globe. With options for beginning and advanced providers, LER supports your learning throughout your entire lactation consulting career. Offering credits for lactation consultants, nurses, advanced practice nurses, physicians, pharmacists and doulas.
 - **TLN:** The Lactation Network helps families connect with insurance-covered lactation care they deserve from IBCLCs that are local to them.
 - **La Leche League:** La Leche League International is a non-governmental, non-profit organization that organizes advocacy, education, and training related to breastfeeding.
 - **ROSE (Reaching Our Sisters Everywhere):** ROSE is a national nonprofit organization with a mission to serve communities, through a continued focus on centering the breastfeeding needs of Black families and impacting broader maternal, infant, and family health outcomes across the nation.
 - **The Melanated Mammary Atlas:** is a dynamic health provider resource that features the largest repository of images of conditions on breasts/chests of color in the world. Spanning 30+ conditions and more than a dozen symptoms, the searchable and filterable database is used by health providers on 6 continents to expand their acumen and assist in assessment and diagnosis of patients with deeply melanated skin. The Melanated Mammary Atlas® displays mammary related conditions exclusively on Asian, Indigenous, Black and Brown humans
 - **Birthing Advocacy Doula Training (BADT):** BADT's vision is to provide accessible, conscious, culturally appropriate, diverse, and action-oriented courses with the framework of care, choice, and justice, towards a better, more equal world.
 - **Child Birth International (CBI):** A short course (2-3 hours) that walks you through the options available to becoming a lactation professional. Choose the amount you would like to pay for this course.
 - **LGBTQIA2S Families & Breastfeeding Online Course(s) & Continuing Education:** Access the latest clinical skills and research for LGBTQIA2S Families & Breastfeeding for Lactation & Breastfeeding professional training. These LGBTQIA2S Families & Breastfeeding online courses provide practice-changing skills and valuable perspectives from leading global experts. This LGBTQIA2S Families & Breastfeeding education has been accredited for a variety of CEUs / CERPs and can be accessed on-demand, at your own pace
 - **Nikki and Nikki Lactation Career Consultants:** Collaborating to advance the field of lactation support by equipping aspiring lactation professionals of color with the right tools at the right time to make a difference.
 - **The B.L.A.C.K. Course:** To diversify lactation education, reduce breastfeeding disparities and highlight the unique history and lived experience of Black mothers, fathers, birthing people and families in America and the African diaspora as it pertains to lactation.
 - **Breastfeeding Practice Tools for Health Professionals:** Help your patients achieve their breastfeeding goals with evidence-based practice tools and resources.
-  **Local In-Person Support Groups and Resources:**
- **Huntsville Hospital Women's and Children's**
 - **Madison Hospital**
 - **Crestwood Hospital**
 - **La Leche League of Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi**
 - **ADPH WIC**





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