



WORLD ALLIANCE FOR BREASTFEEDING ACTION



WABA GLOBAL DAY OF PARENTS 2021 STATEMENT

Pandemic perspectives: A whole-of-society approach to protect and support parenting and breastfeeding


Today is the [Global Day of Parents](#). The pandemic has deteriorated the [parenting experience](#) for many families especially low-income groups. Last year, WABA asked parents around the world ([Guatemala](#), [Malaysia](#), [Sweden](#) and [Zimbabwe](#)) about the impact of the pandemic on their lives as parents with a breastfeeding child. This year, we followed up with them to know how they are coping and share their advice to other new parents.

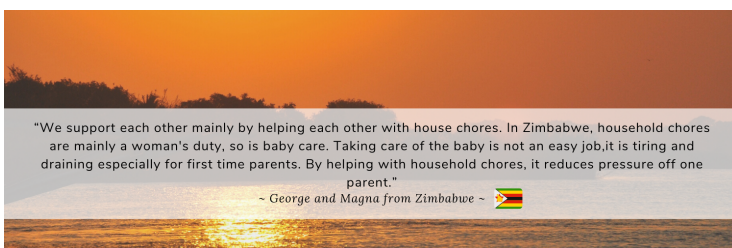
The pandemic affected parents both positively and negatively. The lockdown and physical distancing policies allowed some parents more time at home to bond with their children as a family and breastfeed on demand. On the other hand, health care workers and other parents in the essential services were burdened with heavy workloads but they try to spend as much time as possible with their children at home. Another major concern for these parents is that their children are largely growing up in isolation away from their extended family, friends and other babies. The sudden COVID-19 outbreaks in certain parts of the world are concerning as they may lead to new cycles of lockdown and restrictions. These can sometimes negatively affect sources of income and subsequently living conditions and lifestyles.

Parents support each other by sharing domestic tasks and childcare responsibilities. For parents working in the health system and other essential economies, taking turns to care for their child and dividing the domestic and childcare work on a daily basis is a reality that needs to take into account individual workload for the day. Parents working from home are more prone to taking turns between paid work and care work. However, this can extend their daily work schedule. They also emphasise the need to be responsive to each other's needs and everyday parenting challenges. Taking turns also means allowing one parent some personal time and space while the other parent tends to the child's needs and vice versa. The key is effective communication and setting new social norms where both parents share the responsibility equally.




"We both come home exhausted on a daily basis. So we basically gauge who is less tired and we would divide the chores accordingly. Example If he gives her a bath, I'd read her bedtime story and tuck her in and vice versa."

- Dev and Thivya from Malaysia - 




"We support each other mainly by helping each other with house chores. In Zimbabwe, household chores are mainly a woman's duty, so is baby care. Taking care of the baby is not an easy job, it is tiring and draining especially for first time parents. By helping with household chores, it reduces pressure off one parent."

- George and Magna from Zimbabwe - 




"We had to reinvent our way of working, and both of us are working from home. For the most part, we are taking turns in working and taking care of her, which means between the two of us, the daily work schedule is extended."

~ Luis and Viana from Guatemala ~ 



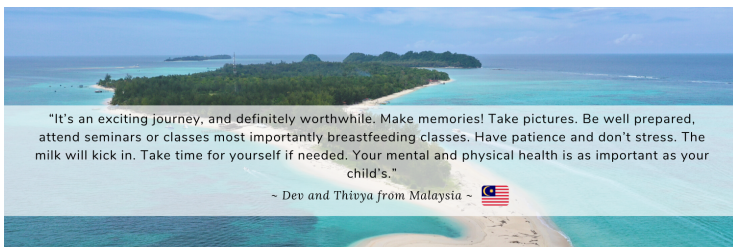
"We try to be responsive to each others needs and try to make room for alone time when needed. But most of the time we try to stick together (when I'm not at work), so that we can assist and support with everyday challenges that may occur. A tip from us is to let your partner do things for themselves from time to time. Sometimes you need some space."

~ Josef and Mikaela from Sweden ~ 


Lack of evidence on COVID-19 transmission through breastmilk initially resulted in concern over the safety of breastfeeding. [WHO](#) and other national health bodies have subsequently declared that breastfeeding should be continued and recommended with safety precautions for suspected cases of COVID-19. However, some countries have [contradictory national guidelines](#). Health systems need to create evidence-based policies since we now know that COVID-19 does not transmit through breastmilk and the [benefits outweigh the risks](#). New parents were also not able to access breastfeeding support from the health systems due to the diversion of services to COVID-19 management and also to comply with the physical distancing rules. Several breastfeeding support groups have stepped up and established [telelactation services](#).

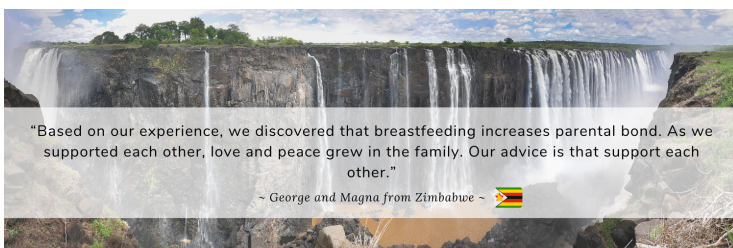
Another constant factor undermining breastfeeding is the promotion and unethical marketing of breastmilk substitutes. The breastmilk substitute industries are very efficient in targeting new parents and a rise in [marketing violations was recorded during the pandemic](#). Some of the parents we interviewed noticed marketing in general stores and digital marketing in online marketplaces. Countries worldwide must implement, monitor and enforce the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and subsequent World Health Assembly resolutions to curb unnecessary usage of these products. In addition, governments must match the marketing of breastmilk substitutes with breastfeeding promotion and support to ensure new parents have sufficient information to make informed decisions.

Parenthood is a new, exciting journey. However, the journey for [new parents in the midst of a pandemic](#) was very different. Parents need each other's support and understanding to raise their children with their shared values. Breastfeeding not only increases the bond between the child and parents but also the bond shared between the parents. Breastfeeding decisions must be mutual and both parents must prepare for it by equipping themselves with breastfeeding knowledge through classes, books and online resources. Keep in mind that every child's needs are different and parents working together in a breastfeeding team will help alleviate and overcome some of the everyday challenges.




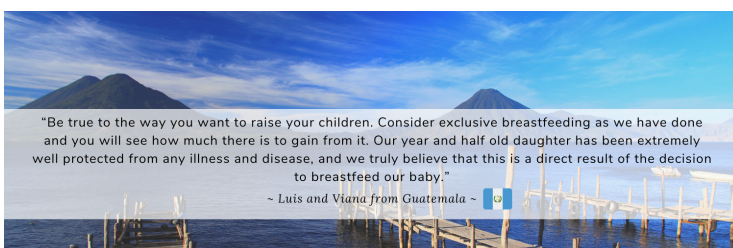
"It's an exciting journey, and definitely worthwhile. Make memories! Take pictures. Be well prepared, attend seminars or classes most importantly breastfeeding classes. Have patience and don't stress. The milk will kick in. Take time for yourself if needed. Your mental and physical health is as important as your child's."

~ Dev and Thivya from Malaysia ~ 





"Based on our experience, we discovered that breastfeeding increases parental bond. As we supported each other, love and peace grew in the family. Our advice is that support each other."

~ George and Magna from Zimbabwe ~ 




"Be true to the way you want to raise your children. Consider exclusive breastfeeding as we have done and you will see how much there is to gain from it. Our year and half old daughter has been extremely well protected from any illness and disease, and we truly believe that this is a direct result of the decision to breastfeed our baby."

~ Luis and Viana from Guatemala ~ 



"Take things as they come. It's so different for every child. Try not to stress, most of the things will fall into place eventually."

- Josef and Mikaela from Sweden - 

A public health approach to breastfeeding will ensure parents receive all the support and protection they need. To reach the [global breastfeeding target 2025](#) and support parents worldwide, national governments must implement policies and legislation that are supportive of breastfeeding including parental social protection, health systems must implement [Baby-friendly Hospital Initiatives](#), employers must understand the benefits of breastfeeding to them and support it through [breastfeeding-friendly policies](#) at workplace, and community must champion breastfeeding as the social norm. This means creating a [warm chain of support](#) for the breastfeeding dyad for the first 1,000 days through cooperation of actors at different levels of the society. Join the [World Breastfeeding Week 2021](#) to advocate to all sectors of society on their shared responsibilities in the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding.

This Global Day of Parents, [WABA](#) applauds the commitment and efforts of all parents to their children and breastfeeding especially in these times of uncertainty due to the effects of the global pandemic. We call upon the whole of society to:

- implement, monitor and enforce the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and subsequent World Health Assembly resolutions
- ensure that health systems provide unbiased, consistent breastfeeding information and support throughout the 1000 days.
- improve parental social protection policies and laws that support optimal breastfeeding.
- ensure that all workplaces protect and support working parents to achieve their breastfeeding goals.
- galvanise community action to provide breastfeeding protection and support close to parents.

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From more information, contact [Thinagaran Letchimanan](#)

#GlobalDayofParents #WABA #breastfeeding #WBW2021 #COVID19



World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) is a global network of individuals and organisations dedicated to the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding worldwide based on the Innocenti Declarations, the Ten Links for Nurturing the Future and the WHO/UNICEF Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding. WABA is in consultative status with UNICEF and an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC). WABA coordinates the annual World Breastfeeding Week campaign.

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