

Becoming Baby Friendly Isn't Child's Play

When bringing a baby into the world, a new parent often faces a lot of uncertainty. From sleeping schedules and swaddles to how to best feed the baby, the first few days of parenthood can be incredibly overwhelming. Having a birthing center care team that understands that stress and is specially trained to assist in all aspects of feeding and bonding can help both mom and baby build a foundation for success. That's where the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) comes in.

The [BFHI](#) was launched to encourage and recognize hospitals and birthing centers that offer an optimal level of care for infant feeding and mother/baby bonding.

Three OSF HealthCare hospitals are certified as Baby-Friendly: OSF Heart of Mary Medical Center in Urbana, OSF Little Company of Mary Medical Center in Evergreen Park, and OSF St. Joseph Medical Center in Bloomington, where Sarah Musselman serves as a lactation consultant in the Birthing Center. Musselman says Baby-Friendly goes well beyond breastfeeding.

"A Baby-Friendly Hospital - it's not just all about breastfeeding," explains Musselman. "It's really maternity care and excellence in providing that care, because it also supports our families that are formula feeding their babies. And so we want to also make sure that we teach them to do it safely and how to feed their baby."

With Baby-Friendly practices in place, babies born at the hospital spend more time at their mother's bedside and both mom and baby get round-the-clock support navigating feeding.

According to nurses Shirin Shoushtari and Joey Evans, both certified lactation counselors at the OSF St. Joseph Birthing Center, that 24/7 support can be invaluable to a new mom who is struggling to feed her baby during an overnight shift.

"In the middle of the night they're struggling because now the baby is tired, the mom is exhausted, the baby's not latching. So having coverage 24/7 will help to address the problem on time and solve it on time. So the baby doesn't get exhausted, the mom doesn't get anxious," says Shoushtari.

Evans adds, "To have that extra person on night shift as a CLC, it's going to help our moms succeed in breastfeeding too. Because if we don't have someone who has a little bit of extra knowledge in breastfeeding on night shift, then they may not have those extra ideas to help get that mom through that feeding through the night."

Becoming a Baby-Friendly facility, however, is not child's play. It's a comprehensive journey that requires extensive training. The initiative compels hospitals to examine, challenge and modify existing policies and procedures. In Musselman and her team's case, that meant major changes to the status quo.

"It really changed our culture as to how we provide care. And so it took us a long time. It took us about three years before we were ready for Baby-Friendly, the organization, to come to our hospital to say we're ready," recalls Musselman. "We audited our patients, all of our policies, all the training that's involved with our staff, with our physicians. So it really is very laborious to become designated."

The Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative encourages the [Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding](#). All Baby-Friendly hospitals are equipped to give mothers the information, confidence and skills necessary to successfully breastfeed their babies or to formula feed.

According to the team at OSF St. Joseph, being there to witness the bond between a new mom and her baby and to help build that successful feeding foundation are often the most rewarding parts of their job.

“It's a lot of work. It takes a whole tribe to do it. And if we are part of their tribe that makes me feel good,” says Evans.

To learn more about The Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative, visit osfhealthcare.org.