CULTURALLY RELEVANT BREASTFEEDING SUPPORT IN NATIVE AMERICAN AND COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

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2017 Minnesota Breastfeeding Coalition Meeting

“For People of Color, food is complex. It’s heartbreaking and it holds our family stories like a book holds recipes. For People of Color…. FOOD. IS. EVERYTHING”.

A LITTLE STORY ABOUT MY LAST TRADITIONAL FOODS CONFERENCE
WHAT DOES BREASTMILK DO?

WHY IS BREASTFEEDING ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT TO THE NATIVE COMMUNITY?

**BABIES THAT ARE NOT BREASTFED**
- 73% increased risk of SIDS
- Increased risk of diabetes (Type 1 and 2)
- Increased risk of obesity
- Increased risk of heart disease
- Increased risk of several cancers
- Optimal bonding/attachment with mom

**MOMS THAT DO NOT BREASTFEED**
- Increased risk of Type 2 diabetes
- Increased risk of obesity
- Increased risk of heart disease
- Increased risk of reproductive cancers
- Optimal bonding/attachment with baby

Blankfeet Breastfeeds
WHERE DO WE STAND?

**Exclusive Breastfeeding for the first 6 months**

**Breastfeed for a minimum of 2 years**

(The AAP recommends a minimum of 1 year BF)

**Comparing Breastfeeding Rates**

- General Population
- Native American

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**Monetary Cost**
- Minimum $200/month direct costs
- $13 billion saved if 90% of women exclusively breastfed for 6 months

**Environmental Cost**
- Waste: Formula cans are not recyclable nor biodegradable. They will be here forever.
- Water Usage: A formula-fed baby will use nearly 11,000 oz. of water just to make the formula for 1 baby for 12 months. This does not include the indirect usage of thousands of gallons.
- Dairy Production: 1.8 million tons of cows milk is used to make infant formula producing 2.5 billion kg of CO2 (Greenhouse Gases)

**Cultural Cost**
- Religion + Land + Food

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SO WHY DO SO FEW NATIVE WOMEN BREASTFEED?

- Poverty
- Lack of education
- Lack of prenatal care
- **Lack of Support**
  - Significant other
  - Mother or grandmother
  - Health care provider
  - Community
- Cultural changes that have "eliminated breastfeeding as a traditional practice"
HISTORY

"A great general has said that the only good Indian is a dead one… I agree with the sentiment, but only in this: that all the Indian there is in the race should be dead. Kill the tribal of life, and save the breed.”

Capt. Richard Pratt (Carlisle Boarding School)

- Removal of our language
- Removal of our religion
- Removal of our culture
- Removal of our food
- Removal of our land
- Removal from our mothers

HISTORICAL TRAUMA RESPONSE

Historical Trauma Response (HTR)- a constellation of features in reaction to massive group trauma

What are the effects of historical trauma?
- Unsettled emotional trauma, depression, PTSD, high mortality rates, high rates of alcohol abuse, child abuse and domestic violence, vitality in own life seen as a betrayal to ancestors who suffered so much, etc.

What does this mean for parenting?
- Disempowerment of our roles and sacredness of women and children.
- Devaluation of traditional Native parenting and removal of our basic rights to raise our children in our own ways
- Negative impact upon our self-esteem as parents and as Native Peoples
- Increase in domestic violence/child abuse which were foreign to Native cultures

Yellow Horse Brave Heart, Maria (1998, 1999, 2000)

TRADITIONAL MEANING OF NATIVE PARENTING

- Taking care of the Nation
- Sacred Responsibility
- We don’t own our children
- Children are placed at the center of the Nation
- Need to rebuild our Nation
- Children have wisdom

Yellow Horse Brave Heart, Maria (1998, 1999, 2000)
6 PHASES OF HISTORICAL UNRESOLVED GRIEF

1. First Contact: Life shock, genocide, no time for grief
   Colonization Period: Introduction of disease and alcohol, traumatic events
2. Economic Competition: Sustenance loss (physical/spiritual)
3. Invasion/War Period: extermination, refugee symptoms
4. Subjugation/Reservation Period: confined/translocated, forced dependence on oppressor, lack of security
5. Boarding School Period: destroyed family system, beatings, rape, prohibition of Native language and religion
6. Forced Relocation and Termination Period: transfer to urban area, prohibition of religious freedom, racism and being viewed as second class, loss of governmental system and community

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We must recognize that our actions will affect the next seven generations.

BREASTFEEDING CHANGES EVERYTHING

GREAT GREAT GREAT GRANDMOTHER
OUR CHOICES TODAY WILL AFFECT THE NEXT SEVEN GENERATIONS
BREASTFEEDING AS AN ACT OF CONTROL OVER OUR HEALTH

PHYSICAL

BREASTFEEDING AS AN ACT OF POWER

EMOTIONAL

BREASTFEEDING AS AN ACT OF PARENTING

MENTAL
BREASTFEEDING AS AN ACT OF SOVEREIGNTY

BREASTFEEDING IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY

THANK YOU FOR BREASTFEEDING!

“When a mother nurses her baby, she is giving that child her name, her story and her life’s song. A nursed baby will grow to be strong in body, mind and spirit.”

Annie Kahn, Round Rock