

# PROTECTING BREASTFEEDING

## Visual Artists Have a Role to Play

When you create artworks on family themes, what do you use to represent babies or motherhood? What influence does marketing have on the choice of symbols or images? Does this symbolism influence parental decisions?

What types of visual representation of parenting, from pregnancy to toddlers, avoid adding to the pressure exerted on women and parents, especially where infant and young child feeding is concerned?

A picture is worth a thousand words: as an artist, a creator in fine arts, applied arts, illustration, or media arts, you know how important the role of images and their symbolic value are. Your creativity influences social norms. By choosing neutral visual symbols to depict parenting and young children, you can help protect breastfeeding.





“Art is a technique of communication. The image is the most complete technique of all communication.”<sup>1</sup> *Claes Thure Oldenburg, sculpteur*

**Commercial infant formula, bottles, and pacifiers are vastly overrepresented in our society compared with breastfeeding.** Not only is breastfeeding much less present but it is also more often associated with negative experiences or situations.<sup>2</sup> In addition, breastfeeding toddlers is nearly invisible in Quebec society, which feeds taboos about this practice.

The omnipresence of images of these products exerts a considerable marketing influence on social norms and public opinion by suggesting that bottle-feeding is normal or even ideal. Families face enormous pressure to buy and use them, to the detriment of breastfeeding.

**It is not a matter of stigmatizing families who use commercial infant formula, bottles, or pacifiers, or even of promoting breastfeeding, but of being careful to avoid normalizing the use of these products.**

In Quebec, although the vast majority of women initiate breastfeeding when their babies are born, breastfeeding rates decrease rapidly over the first few weeks. Only 8% of mothers continue breastfeeding as long as they planned,<sup>3</sup> partly because of the “bottle-feeding culture” constructed by intense marketing for products to replace breastfeeding.

## A code that aims to protect all families

In order to protect breastfeeding, while ensuring the safe use of breast milk substitutes, including commercial infant formula, when necessary, Canada is a signatory to the *International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes* (the Code)<sup>4</sup>, adopted in 1981 at the World Health Assembly (WHA) by a 118 nations. Since then, the Code has been regularly updated by WHA resolutions.<sup>5</sup> The Code’s purpose is not to prohibit the use of breast milk substitutes, but to ensure “that they are not distributed in ways that harm the protection and promotion of breastfeeding.” It also states that materials “should not use any pictures or text which may idealize the use of breast-milk substitutes.”

### PRODUCTS WITHIN THE SCOPE

of the *International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes*

- All food and beverages for children under 36 months of age
- Bottles and nipples
- Pacifiers



# INSPIRING IDEAS to Respond to the Needs of All Families

There are countless alternatives for visual representation of babies, young children, or mothers without making reference to a feeding method. Images of bottles, whatever they may contain, should be avoided.

A picture of a baby in the parent's arms or of a rattle or stuffed animal, for example, rather than a bottle or a pacifier, is a way of protecting breastfeeding and complying with the Code.

Including these alternatives in an organization's editorial policy or graphic charter ensures that communications are neutral and appropriate for all practices.

Displaying or posting artwork showing newborns or toddlers breastfeeding helps normalize this practice, especially when shown in public spaces or places families visit (some examples below).

Although breast pumps are used by some women, they are nonetheless commercial products and their use should not be normalized in visual representations.

The World Health Assembly “urges the media and creative industries to ensure that their activities across all communication channels and media outlets, in all settings and using all marketing techniques, are carried out in accordance with the guidance recommendations on ending the inappropriate promotion of foods for infants and young children.”<sup>6</sup>

**Articles 4 and 7 of the Code** stipulate that educational and informational materials “should not use any pictures or text which may idealize the use of breast-milk substitutes” and “should not imply or create a belief that bottle-feeding is equivalent or superior to breastfeeding.”<sup>4</sup>

**People are more likely to identify with representations of breastfeeding, because 90% of families initiate breastfeeding.<sup>7</sup>**



# DID YOU KNOW?

## Two years or longer

Health Canada, among other groups, recommends sustained breastfeeding for up to two years or longer with appropriate complementary feeding after six months.<sup>8</sup>

## Disproportionate investments

The commercial infant formula industry, which generates more than \$55 billion in sales every year, invests approximately 10% of its sales revenue in marketing<sup>9</sup>: a colossal sum compared with the small amount invested by public health in promoting and supporting breastfeeding. This commercial pressure is in large part responsible, directly or through its impact on social norms, for the drop in breastfeeding rates and duration.<sup>2</sup>

## Early weaning

The main reason given for discontinuing breastfeeding earlier than planned is a perceived lack of milk,<sup>10</sup> even though insufficient milk supply is actually rare and a low supply is often related to the use of commercial infant formula, bottles, or pacifiers.

## Rattles

Rattles are one of the oldest toys in the world. They are made in a variety of shapes and from different materials and are now more widespread than ever in different cultures.<sup>(11)</sup> Rattles are objects that are deeply rooted in the collective imagination as symbols of babies and young children.

Visual artists can create images that are inclusive and appropriate for all families, while participating in restoring breastfeeding to its status as the social norm and helping reduce the pressure exerted on women.

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