

POSHAN GHAR STORIES

It's Fathers' Turn Now to Help Close the Breastfeeding Gap

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Reema was crouched beside a mud stove, balancing a tea kettle with one hand and her 4-month-old baby with the other. When we asked gently, *“Didi, do you hold your baby like this while working, or is today an exception? Does his someone else in the family not help you?”* She laughed, not with humour or resignation.

We then asked, *“Why don’t they help?”* Reema explained that the father is present during the day and says he doesn’t know how to handle a baby or what to do when the child starts crying. So she manages everything on her own, holding the kettle and adjusting her routine completely around his needs. She sleeps when the baby sleeps and eats while feeding him; that’s simply how her days unfold. Worse, if the father is busy feeding the baby and the tea boils over on the stove, she is called ‘

Reema isn’t alone. During our community visits, we have seen many other women, including mothers working in the fields, struggling to balance their jobs for wages, their babies, and household responsibilities.

When we think of breastfeeding, we often picture a smiling mother and her baby. But this image is incomplete. Picture the mother feeding her child while she cooks a meal or folds laundry nearby. This is a complete picture of care and support where parenting is a daily practice.



Source: UNICEF India

Yet, most fathers remain on the margins of caregiving, not because they but because they have rarely been encouraged to participate in caregiving places, society continues to view childrearing as a woman's domain, especially the critical first 1,000 days of life, when breastfeeding is vital for a child's and the mother's own recovery.

The father's role in supporting breastfeeding is both obvious and overlooked. A growing body of research shows that when fathers actively assist with rest, nutrition, household tasks, and baby care, breastfeeding rates increase and maternal stress decreases. Their involvement boosts mothers' confidence in breastfeeding and increases the likelihood of sustained breastfeeding. Fathers who engage in caregiving help foster a stronger bond with their child, creating a positive family dynamic and relieving the mother's burden. This collaborative approach promotes a healthier, more supportive environment for the mother and the child.



Source: UNICEF India

Here are some of the many doable ways in which a father can contribute depending on the context:

1. Fathers can start by learning about breastfeeding—the benefits, proper latching techniques, and recognising the baby's hunger cues. This knowledge enables him to provide informed support to the baby without being dependent on the mother. They can visit anganwadi centres, seek help from ASHA workers, or healthcare centres.
2. Small actions can make a significant difference. Fathers can ensure the mother stays hydrated by keeping water bottles filled and within reach and remind her to take medications (if any) on time.
3. Sharing tasks, such as laundry, cleaning, meal preparation, and diapering, can lighten the mother's load and provide her with much-needed rest.
4. Taking alternate turns with nighttime baby care allows the mother to

enough sleep. For couples using milk pumps, fathers can help by pro bottles and cleaning pump parts, making the process less stressful t mother.

5. Spending quality time with the baby strengthens the father-child bo Activities like talking, singing, reading, or helping with bedtime routi excellent ways to connect with the baby.
6. Emotional support is crucial. Offering understanding, reassurance, a vigilant for signs of postpartum depression can significantly impact t mother's well-being. It can be as basic as asking the mother how the where support can be extended.



Source: UNICEF India

So there's definitely a space that fathers can positively contribute. While

breastfeeding may be biological, sustaining it takes a community, and th with fathers and the family members.

Fathers are not simply bystanders in the breastfeeding journey; through involvement, they can help close the gap in breastfeeding support and c to healthier family outcomes.

Note: this blog was originally published at ZealGrit's [website](#).

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