

Sometimes nature needs a little nudge

Lactation educator offers moms tips, support for breastfeeding baby

By Liz Kellar
Staff writer

Breastfeeding your baby might seem like the most natural thing in the world. But for many new mothers, the actual process can be painful and definitely not as intuitive as they thought, leading some to bottle-feed or wean their infants early.

"It's supposed to be natural, so when it doesn't go well, you feel like a failure," said lactation educator Laurie Chamberlin. "For nine months, you focus on childbirth, which is one day in your life. We barely focus on breastfeeding, which is a year" or even two.

Chamberlin, who also is a certified childbirth educator and certified doula, has been teaching prenatal breastfeeding classes since 2004. She offers phone consultations and office visits, as well as free classes once a month, in conjunction with Future Generations, a children's store in Grass Valley.

John and Kristy Hannan, whose baby is due Oct. 6, attended Chamberlin's breastfeeding class as well as her childbirth preparation class.

"I wanted to learn as much as I could so I could be any help I could," said Josh Hannan. "She communicates so well, not just with the women but the men, too. We learned a lot of techniques."

Rob and Robin Rush, another pair of first-time parents-to-be, will be as ready as they can be for their baby, due Thursday. They've taken both the aforementioned classes and are taking a newborn care class tonight.

"I really want my husband to feel as prepared as possible," Robin Rush said. "I think I have an idea, but I haven't really been around babies that much. The classes have been incredible, it's taught us a lot."

At first, Rush said, she didn't think her husband needed to be involved in the breastfeeding class.

"But then I thought I wanted him to know how to help me and how important the breast milk is," she said.

Rush said Chamberlin's use of fun props during the class will help her remember what to do when the time comes.

"She has a fake boob and a monkey, like a

puppet," Rush said. "She got all of us involved."

Rush called the class an "eye-opening experience," adding, "I'm glad we're prepared in case we do come across a problem. And if it isn't getting solved, I can just pick up the phone and call Laurie and she'll be down to help us."

Chamberlin, who has a degree in communications, was working in graphic design when she decided on a radical career shift.

She had "such a great breastfeeding experience" with her first child that she wanted to share that with the community, she explained.

But her second child was a different matter.

"I had every breastfeeding problem that exists," she said. "Those days were so dark. ... I weaned him at 2 1/2 months. I threw in the towel. ... If I had it to do it over again, I would have hired someone to come in every other day, to keep me on track."

But in the end, Chamberlin's failure turned her into a better teacher.

"I tell people, I've done both, I've done bottle-feeding and breastfeeding, I've had a wonderful experience and a challenging experience," she explained. "It actually deepened my work."

One reason young mothers don't have that knowledge of how to breastfeed is that almost two generations of women skipped breastfeeding, Chamberlin said.

"There's so much to know and you're supposed to be an expert right away," she said. "I tell people the first six weeks is practice."

Chamberlin encourages pregnant women to take her prenatal class, so they have a smooth transition once the baby is born and learn the best way to breastfeed right off the bat.

"I love this work, it's so darn rewarding," she said. "If I can show them how to latch the baby on and there's no pain, they can enjoy the experience instead of wanting to escape it."



Chamberlin Childbirth
530.477.5442
www.chamberlinchildbirth.com

Laurie Chamberlin of Chamberlin Childbirth offers free prenatal breastfeeding classes.

Photo for *The Union* by John Hart