

THE LANDSCAPE OF BREASTFEEDING SUPPORT



Breastfeeding support: a user's guide

Lactation title	Hours of required classroom training specific to breastfeeding	Hours of required clinical experience	Independently accredited? Accredited by NCCA *?	Certification exam	Requires prerequisites? (eg, college coursework, breastfeeding experience)	Recertification process	Typical scope of practice; comments
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Lactation Consultants (professional certification)

International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC) , from International Board of Lactation Consultant Examiners (IBCLE) (IBLCE/Americas is based in Virginia)	90 hours of approved training (45 hours before 2012)	300-1000 hours (Peer counselors need 1000 hours, at least 500 of which must be directly supervised by an IBCLC)	Yes, by IBLCE which is accredited by NCCA .	Yes. Professional certification. Overseen by an outside expert in test validation, highly proctored, requires broad range of knowledge included in a core curriculum and clinical experience tested by photographs.	Yes, 14 college courses as prerequisites as of 2012 OR existing health professional license	Recertify with 75 approved continuing education hours or retaking the exam every 5 years; all IBCLCs must retake the exam every 10 years in order to continue to practice.	Perform professional comprehensive clinical lactation consultations, assessing problems. Typically hired by hospitals and clinics as lactation consultants, and often teach breastfeeding classes and serve as faculty for other breastfeeding certifications. They are also fully qualified to set up private practices. It is the only certification recognized by the US Surgeon General as lactation consultant, and the only one used as a quality metric by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Individuals who hold this certification are expected to be able to help mothers with a wide range of breastfeeding difficulties. They must provide written communication to the mother or baby's health care providers, and keep written records. It is the provider credential recommended by the National Business Group on Health in its Model Benefits Package for what employers /insurers should cover relative to the provision of lactation care and services.
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*NCCA is the [National Commission of Certifying Agencies](#) of the Institute for Credentialing Excellence

Breastfeeding Counselors and Educational Programs (May include certificate programs)

Lactation title	Hours of required classroom training specific to breastfeeding	Hours of required clinical experience	Independently accredited? Accredited by NCCA *?	Certificate or exam, if any	Requires prerequisites? (eg, college coursework, breastfeeding experience)	Recertification process	Typical scope of practice; comments
<p>Certified Lactation Counselor (CLC), from Healthy Children’s Center for Breastfeeding (also known as Healthy Children Project; based in Massachusetts)</p> <p>(Note: not affiliated with www.healthychildren.org from the American Academy of Pediatrics)</p>	45 hours	None	Not accredited by NCCA. (See comments for further information)	Exam given at the end of the course. Examinees are tested on breastfeeding assessments using videos.	No	Recertify 3 years, with 18 hours of continuing education.	<p>“Successful completion of the course signifies that the learner has met the required competencies and has a firm grounding in information and counseling skills required to provide basic support to breastfeeding mothers and children.”</p> <p>Nurses, midwives, dieticians, and other health professionals may augment their education by earning this certificate. Used by WIC Peer Counselors in several states, and used by many individuals to fulfill some of the requirements to sit for the lactation consultant (IBLCE) exam.</p> <p>Certification and exam are provided by the Academy of Lactation Policy and Practice (ALPP). The Massachusetts corporations database indicates that ALPP “merged into Healthy Children Project” and that they share the same address.</p>
<p>Certified Lactation Specialist from Lactation Education Consultants (based in Illinois)</p>	45 hours	None	No	Exam given at the end of the course.	Yes	N/a	Training course used to fulfill some of the requirements to sit for the lactation consultant (IBCLE) exam. “Certification as a lactation specialist is achieved through attendance at the entire course, completion of assigned homework and readings during the course, and passing the of the end of course exam on the last day.”
<p>Lactation Specialist (LS), from UCSD extension (based in San Diego, CA)</p>	16 hours (all in classroom) or 20 hours online	(5 hours clinical is required for Baby-Friendly)	N/a	No exam.	N/a	N/a	Two day didactic course geared toward hospital staff to satisfy the educational requirements of the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative. It “is not a certificate or certificated program.”

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Mother-to-Mother support: Peer counselors, lay counselors

Lactation title	Hours of required classroom training specific to breastfeeding	Hours of required clinical experience	Independently accredited? Accredited by NCCA *?	Certificate or exam, if any	Requires prerequisites? (eg, college coursework, breastfeeding experience)	Recertification process	Typical scope of practice; comments
Leader from La Leche League International (LLLI; based in Illinois)	La Leche League International's training is a comprehensive, but self-paced, study program. The average training time is 12 months.	In addition to having breastfed her own baby, a mother generally demonstrates progressively increasing helping skills with other mothers at LLL meetings as she progresses in her training toward leadership.	No	Using a skills assessment model, the applicant practices applying her breastfeeding knowledge and communication skills in role-plays with her training Leader/s until all are confident she can help mothers individually and in a group setting.	Must be a member of LLLI, must have breastfed a baby for a year, must have completed LLLI's comprehensive training program. Training prerequisites: Must have a letter of recommendation from at least one active LLL Leader, must have attended meetings and demonstrated warm caring attitude toward mothers there.	Leaders are accountable to stay current on breastfeeding information and LLLI policies and procedures.	Volunteer lay counselors who give mother-to-mother support on behalf of the organization. The LLLI training program focuses on the normal course of breastfeeding from prenatal through weaning. Effective communication skills and group dynamics for leading support groups are also included.

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Mother-to-Mother support: Peer counselors, lay counselors, continued

Lactation title	Hours of required classroom training specific to breastfeeding	Hours of required clinical experience	Independently accredited? Accredited by NCCA *?	Certificate or exam, if any	Requires prerequisites? (eg, college coursework, breastfeeding experience)	Recertification process	Typical scope of practice; comments
Breastfeeding Counselor from Breastfeeding USA (registered in New York)	Self-directed course lasting 4 weeks to 6 months	None	No	Centralized certificate process issued by Breastfeeding USA	Yes, must have breastfed a baby for at least a year.	Yes, 20 hours of approved credits every 3 years and report monthly activities.	Volunteer lay counselors who give mother-to-mother support on behalf of the organization. Breastfeeding USA “provides evidence-based information and support, and promotes breastfeeding as the biological and cultural norm.”
Nursing Mothers’ Council/Counsel (NMC, NMC Counselor)	Varies	N/a	No	May vary	Generally, must have breastfed.		Volunteer lay counselors who give mother-to-mother support on behalf of the organization. These organizations share a name but are separate local organizations scattered around the US (Oregon, Massachusetts, Philadelphia, the San Francisco Bay Area). They are all mother-to-mother support organizations and have varying ways of training their counselors to meet the volunteer needs of each organization.
WIC Peer Counselors	There is a national WIC Peer Counselor curriculum, typically 18-20 classroom hours. Peer counselors may have obtained additional training through the CLC or other lactation certificate program..	Current or former WIC client with experience with breastfeeding.	N/a	N/a	N/a	Annual ongoing continuing education requirement.	Mother-to-mother support offering encouragement and identify problems that need more expert referrals. Can help with basic questions and concerns. They address “the barriers to breastfeeding by offering breastfeeding education, support, and role modeling.” They are familiar with the resources available to WIC clients, have familiarity with the questions a new breastfeeding mother may ask, and recognize when to refer mothers to other resources during critical periods when mothers may experience difficulty.” They provide “mother-to-mother support in group settings and one-to-one counseling through telephone calls or visits in the home, clinic, or hospital.” Some experienced peer counselors go on to attain the IBCLC credential.

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Breastfeeding Educators

Lactation title	Hours of required classroom training specific to breastfeeding	Hours of required clinical experience	Independently accredited? Accredited by NCCA *?	Certificate or exam, if any	Requires prerequisites? (eg, college coursework, breastfeeding experience)	Recertification process	Typical scope of practice; comments
Certified Lactation Educator (CLE) , from CAPP (based in Georgia)	20 hour Lactation Educator Course, which is actually 24 hours long).	Must observe breastfeeding classes, support groups and IBCLCs.	No	Open book test.	Must be a CAPP member, sign and agree to the CAPP philosophy , code of conduct , scope of practice , and grievance policy . Requirements include completing coursework and required reading, writing an essay, creating a course curriculum.	Recertify every 3 years with:15 hours of continuing education, and good evaluation forms from 10 students, must review 3 lactation studies, and 2 letters of recommendation.	Education of families on breastfeeding; "DOES NOT perform clinical evaluations". Graduates "will be qualified to teach, support, and educate the public on breastfeeding and related issues." They may use their training to augment their support in other professions, such as in the cases of doulas, childbirth educators, nurses, dieticians, and postnatal or parenting educators." This is a certificate program, not a certification program.
Certified Community Lactation Educator (LE(C)) , from CAPP	16	Must observe breastfeeding support groups.	No	Open book test.	Must be a CAPP member and sign and agree to the CAPP philosophy , code of conduct , scope of practice , and grievance policy . Complete coursework and required reading.	Recertify every 3 years with:15 hours of continuing education, and good evaluation forms from 10 students, must review 3 lactation studies, and provide 2 letters of recommendation.	A course "adapted for the provision of one to one breastfeeding support and counseling, this seminar introduces students to the fundamental concepts of lactation, and focuses on developing skills related to providing individual prenatal and postpartum breastfeeding referrals and support." "Does not issue lactation consultant status" "While both the LE(C) and the CLE™ provide families with support and education, the LE(C) is not qualified to lead group classes or facilitate a breastfeeding class. They are trained breastfeeding professionals that offer one on one breastfeeding support and education." This is a certificate program, not a certification program.

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Breastfeeding Educators, continued

Lactation title	Hours of required classroom training specific to breastfeeding	Hours of required clinical experience	Independently accredited? Accredited by NCCA *?	Certificate or exam, if any	Requires prerequisites? (eg, college coursework, breastfeeding experience)	Recertification process	Typical scope of practice; comments
Certified Lactation Educator Counselor (CLEC) - UCSD extension (based in San Diego, CA)	45 hours onsite or 60 hours online option, with additional 20-60 hours homework	Observe one breastfeeding class.	N/a. No.	No exam.		None.	Lactation Educator Counselors teach breastfeeding classes, usually in hospitals and clinics. Lactation Educator Counselors may work with pregnant women and their families in community perinatal health programs such WIC. They may be employed in a “Store” or “boutique” that rents or sells breastfeeding clothes and equipment. This is a certificate program, not a certification program.
Certificated Breastfeeding Educator™ (CBE) from Lactation Consultant Services (based in Oklahoma) (note: not to be confused with Childbirth Educator, also known as CBE)		None. Clinical role play only.	No	Exam given.			

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About this table:

This table is designed to help the public navigate the many different lactation qualifications. Currently, there are no regulations or laws dictating what skills or knowledge are required by a "certification," and whether an individual can put letters after their name signifying any such certification.. Lactation consultation is a young field, and as of July 2012, no state has a law to define and license lactation consultants.

Certification programs versus certificate programs:

There are several important differences between professional certification programs and educational certificate programs. Only the IBLCE program is a professional certification program in lactation consulting, granting the IBCLC certification. According to the Institute for Credentialing Excellence (also known as ICE and formerly known as NOCA), the leader in setting quality standards for credentialing organizations, there are a number of key differences between certification programs and certificate programs. The National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA), part of ICE, is considered the gold standard in accreditation for any certification program. A certification program that is accredited by NCCA has measures in place to eliminate potential conflicts of interest, such as those described above. Its criteria are rigorous. NCCA's precursor, was formed in 1977, in cooperation with the federal government, to develop standards of excellence for voluntary certification programs. NCCA accredits a broad range of [certifying organizations](#).

According to ICE, professional certification is:

“a voluntary process by which a non-governmental body grants time-limited recognition and use of a credential to individuals who have demonstrated that they have met predetermined and standardized criteria for required knowledge, skills or competencies. To retain the credential, certificants must meet requirements for renewal. The credential awarded by the certifier denotes that the participant possesses particular knowledge, skill or competencies.”

(ICE 1100: 2010 (E)—Standard for Assessment-Based Certificate Programs, Institute for Credentialing Excellence, Washington, D.C., 2010.)

A Certificate program

- Provides education and training to an individual
- Is generally associated with a particular course or program
- Is not independent of any provider of classes, courses or programs

A Certification program

- Assessment of knowledge or skills (which is completely separate from training)
- Individuals must meet predetermined criteria (education, professional experience, supervised clinical experience) to be eligible for exam
- Must pass a professionally developed exam
- Is time limited and requires periodic renewal

Generally speaking, lactation consultants are paid lactation professionals who help mothers and babies with a wide range of problems, including sick mothers and babies and are a valuable part of the health care team. These types of problems they evaluate might include excessive weight loss in a breastfed infant, questions about medications, and anatomic issues in the mother or baby that might interfere with breastfeeding.

Counselors generally have less training and they help troubleshoot basic problems, recognize when to refer mothers to other health professionals. They provide valuable emotional support, encouragement, and confidence building. Often they are volunteers serving in mother-to-mother support groups, or may work as WIC peer counselors.

Educators may teach breastfeeding classes to pregnant women.

Most of these organizations charge fees for the training and/or certification, and again for recertification, if they provide it. If the organization that provides the certification is also the same organization that provides the training, there may be a potential conflict of interest. Certification programs from NCCA take measures to ensure that there is no such conflict of interest.

The role of experience:

Some organizations require that an individual holding their certificate must have breastfed her own children. This is especially true for peer counselors offering mother-to-mother support. Be aware that experience breastfeeding one's own children, by itself, is neither necessary nor sufficient to provide professional clinical advice, nor would it count as appropriate clinical experience to qualify one to sit for the exam to become an IBCLC.

While there may be other individuals who are as skilled and knowledgeable as IBCLCs but do not hold this qualification, without the IBCLC, a consumer has no guarantee of an individual's minimum level of training, experience or knowledge. As with any profession, some who hold the qualification may be more skilled than others. Many of these qualifications, including the IBCLC, have a grievance process for removing those certified individuals who are later found to possess insufficient skills for the certification.

Finally, there is a role for individuals who have lesser qualifications than the IBCLC. It is important, however, that the consumer know which is the appropriate type of help or education they should seek.

NOTE: The contents of this chart are subject to change. For the most up to date information on any given credential, please refer to that credential's website or contact them directly.

Sources of information

All information, included quoted information, is taken from the organizations' websites. Information from La Leche League International, CAPP, the courses from UCSD extension, Lactation Education Consultants, and Breastfeeding USA were confirmed after discussion with leaders of each organization or course, often to answer questions that could not be answered from their websites. All information is subject to change.

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