

THE LANDSCAPE OF BREASTFEEDING SUPPORT



Breastfeeding support: a user's guide

Information about this table at the end

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

<p>International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC), from International Board of Lactation Consultant Examiners (IBLCE) (IBLCE/Americas is based in Virginia)</p>	90 hours of training (45 hours before 2012)	300 to1000 hours (Peer counselors need 1000 hours, at least 500 of which must be directly supervised by an IBCLC)	Yes, by IBLCE , an independent organization, which is accredited by NCCA .*	Yes. Professional certification. Exam is overseen by an outside expert in test validation. It is professionally proctored, and requires broad range of knowledge included in a core curriculum and clinical experience tested by photographs.	Yes, 14 specific college courses as pre-requisites 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.	According to the IBCLE Scope of Practice , IBCLCs 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=[National Commission for Certifying Agencies](#)

Breastfeeding Counselors

Lactation title	Hours of required classroom training specific to breastfeeding	Hours of required clinical experience	Certificate or exam, if any	Independently accredited?	Requires prerequisites? (eg, college coursework, breastfeeding experience)	Recertification process	Typical scope of practice; comments
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Certified Lactation Counselor (professional certification)

<p><u>Certified Lactation Counselor (CLC)</u>, 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	Yes. Professional certification exam given at the end of the 5-day course and at other times. It is overseen by an expert in test validation. The professionally proctored exam requires broad range of knowledge included in the UNICEF-WHO Breastfeeding Counseling Training Course and includes breastfeeding assessments using videos.	Yes, by ALPP , an independent branch of Healthy Children. ALPP is independently accredited by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI)	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. Successful candidates have demonstrated competency in breastfeeding counseling, breastfeeding assessment and support skills.” More details on the Scope of Practice are on their website.</p> <p>Per Healthy Children, “CLCs work in hospitals, at WIC, at pediatric offices, in private practice, in community programs. They are L&D nurses, NICU nurses, mother baby nurses, public health nurses, LPNs, doctors, nutritionists, SLPs, OTs, doulas, peer counselors, midwives, perinatal outreach workers, volunteer breastfeeding counselors, and moms who want to learn more. CLCs teach breastfeeding courses, counsel new mothers . . . “</p> <p>Certification and exam are provided by the Academy of Lactation Policy and Practice (ALPP), which is part of Healthy Children. ANSI requires that ALPP be “impartial,” “transparent,” and “shall assure that its organizational structure is independent from other entities, conflicting interests and conflicting activities.”</p>
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<u>Certified Lactation Specialist from Lactation Education Consultants (based in Illinois)</u>	45 hours	None	Exam given at the end of the course.	No	Yes	N/a	Training course used to fulfill some of the requirements to sit for the lactation consultant (IBLCE) exam. A certificate “as a lactation specialist is achieved through attendance at the entire course, completion of assigned homework and readings during the course, and passing of the end of course exam on the last day.”
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Other Breastfeeding Counselor and Educational Programs, including certificate programs

Lactation title	Hours of required classroom training specific to breastfeeding	Hours of required clinical experience	Certificate or exam, if any	Independently accredited?	Requires prerequisites? (eg, college coursework, breastfeeding experience)	Recertification process	Typical scope of practice; comments
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<u>Certified Breastfeeding Specialist from Lactation Education Resources (based in Maryland)</u> (click “Lactation Consultant Training”)	Two options: a 45 hour option for those who already have 45 hours of training, and a full 90 hour option	None (written case studies required)	Exam is given	No	No	No	These courses are designed to fulfill the classroom requirements for the IBCLC exam. Breastfeeding Specialists are trained to counsel, coach and instruct breastfeeding families in uncomplicated situations. They teach group breastfeeding classes. They provide anticipatory guidance and problem solve in situations not likely to precede adverse outcomes. This is a certificate program, not an independently accredited professional certification.
<u>Certified Lactation Specialist from Lactation Education Consultants (based in Illinois)</u>	45 hours	None	Exam given at the end of the course.	No	Yes	N/a	Training course used to fulfill some of the requirements to sit for the lactation consultant (IBLCE) exam. A certificate “as a lactation specialist is achieved through attendance at the entire course, completion of assigned homework and readings during the course, and passing of the end of course exam on the last day.”
<u>Lactation Specialist (LS), from UCSD extension (based in San Diego, CA)</u>	16 hours (all in classroom) or 20 hours online	(5 hours clinical is required for Baby-Friendly)	No exam	N/a	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.”

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

Lactation title	Hours of required classroom training specific to breastfeeding	Hours of required clinical experience	Certificate or exam, if any	Independently accredited?	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.	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.	No	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.

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

Lactation title	Hours of required classroom training specific to breastfeeding	Hours of required clinical experience	Certificate or exam, if any	Independently accredited?	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	Centralized certificate process issued by Breastfeeding USA	No	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	May vary	No	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.

Breastfeeding Educators

Lactation title	Hours of required classroom training specific to breastfeeding	Hours of required clinical experience	Certificate or exam, if any	Independently accredited?	Requires prerequisites? (eg, college coursework, breastfeeding experience)	Recertification process	Typical scope of practice; comments
<u>Certified Lactation Educator (CLE), from CAPP</u> (based in Georgia)	20 hour Lactation Educator Course, which is actually 24 hours long).	Must observe breastfeeding classes, support groups and IBCLCs.	Open book test.	No	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 (see below for explanation).
<u>Certified Community Lactation Educator (LE(C)), from CAPP</u> (based in Georgia)	16	Must observe breastfeeding support groups.	Open book test. No	No	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.

Breastfeeding Educators, continued

Lactation title	Hours of required classroom training specific to breastfeeding	Hours of required clinical experience	Certificate or exam, if any	Independently accredited?	Requires prerequisites? (eg, college coursework, breastfeeding experience)	Recertification process	Typical scope of practice; comments
<p><u>Certified Lactation Educator Counselor</u> (CLEC)- UCSD extension (based in San Diego, CA)</p>	<p>45 hours onsite or 60 hours online option, with additional 20-60 hours homework</p>	<p>Observe one breastfeeding class.</p>	<p>No exam.</p>	<p>N/a.</p>		<p>None</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p><u>Certificated Breastfeeding Educator™ (CBE)</u> from Lactation Consultant Services™ (based in Oklahoma) (note: not to be confused with Childbirth Educator, also known as CBE)</p>		<p>None. Clinical role play only.</p>	<p>Exam given</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>None</p>	<p>5 contact hours every 5 years</p>	<p>Integrate breastfeeding promotion and assistance skills with other perinatal health care services. “Not qualified to represent themselves as lactation consultants.”</p>

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 and counseling is a young field, and as of January 2014, no state has a law to define and license lactation consultants or counselors.

Independent accreditation

There are several important differences between professional certification programs and educational certificate programs. The IBLCE program is the first professional certification program in lactation consulting, granting the IBCLC certification to those who successfully meet the requirements. IBLCE has been independently- accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA) since 1988. As of December 2013, the Academy of Lactation Policy and Practice (ALPP), which grants the Certified Lactation Counselor credential, became independently accredited by the American National Standards Institute ([ANSI](#)).

The National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA), part of Institute for Credentialing Excellence (ICE), accredits many health professional programs. A certification program that is accredited by NCCA has measures in place to eliminate potential conflicts of interest. 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](#).

Like NCCA, ANSI also has similar rigorous standards for excellence, outlined on their website (one [example](#)). Founded in 1918 by engineering organizations, it accredits products, systems and a now broad range of [personnel certification bodies](#), including many in the health professions.

Certification versus Certificate programs

According to the Institute for Credentialing Excellence, there are a number of key differences between certification programs and certificate programs. 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
- Certificate holders “shall not say that they are ‘Certified in . . .’ and “shall not use acronyms or letters after their names to reference the certificate they hold” or make “claims or imply that the certificate is a professional certification.”

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

ANSI has a similar [explanation](#) about the differences between certification and certificate programs.

Generally speaking, lactation consultants (a generic term) are International Board Certified Lactation Consultants (a trademark-protected term): Paid, clinical 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. The 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 in lactation than IBCLCs, and they help troubleshoot basic problems, recognizing when to refer mothers to other health professionals. They provide valuable emotional support, encouragement, and confidence building. The CLC may be an additional credential signifying additional training by a nurse, dietician, or other licensed health care professional. Not all counselors are CLCs. Often counselors 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 training and/or certification, and again for recertification, if provided. If the organization providing the certification is also the same organization providing 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 and training

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. Unlike the IBCLC, the CLC certification exam does not have a clinical experience prerequisite,

Be aware that independently accredited certification provides the consumer with some guarantee of a minimum level of training or competency as it applies to that certification's particular scope of practice. As with any profession, some who hold the qualification may be more skilled than others. Both the IBCLC and the CLC have a grievance process to assess and remove or sanction individuals who are found to possess insufficient skills to hold the certification. It is also important to note that training as a nurse or a physician or other health care worker, by itself, does not necessarily mean that an individual has significant specialized training in breastfeeding or lactation support.

Finally, it is important that the consumer know the appropriate type of breastfeeding help or support they should seek in a particular situation. IBCLCs, for example, may be appropriate for more complex problems such as preterm infants, inadequate weight gain in an infant, or suspected anatomic abnormalities in mothers or infants. Counselors, on the other hand, including CLCs, are generally equipped to address normal breastfeeding in healthy term infants and to address issues common to all mothers and babies, such as latch and positioning.

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 organization'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, Lactation Consultant Services,TM and Breastfeeding USA, and Healthy Children Project 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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