

Children's Words for Breastfeeding

Kathleen Kendall-Tackett, Ph.D. , IBCLC
Family Research Laboratory, University of New Hampshire
Muriel Sugarman, M.D.
Augusta Mental Health Institute, Augusta, Maine

One unique characteristic of long-term breastfeeding is that children often come up with a name for it. Sometimes mothers encourage children to come up with a code word for breastfeeding, especially in a culture where long-term breastfeeding is frowned upon. Other times, children come up with names on their own. The results are often delightful. In our study of long-term breastfeeding, we asked mothers to tell us their children's word for breastfeeding.

We asked 179 American women, recruited from LLL Area Conferences, to complete our survey. All had nursed at least one child for six months or more. One-hundred-and-nineteen indicated that their children had words for breastfeeding.

The most common words children used were derivations on *nurse*, such as "nursey," "nur or nur nur," "nun nun," "urs," "noysing," or "nurnies." Similarly, were the variations on *num*, such as "nummy," "yum yum," "nuh nuh," "nummies," "num num," or "nonny." Other common terms were related to *mommy* ("mama," "mama-mamoo," "mom moms") or *milk* ("milky," "latte," "mocha").

There were lots of repetitive consonant-vowel combinations (common in early language development) such as "me me," "na na," "ne ne," "ta ta," "nu nu," "boo boo," "more more," "ki ki," "ha ha," "bu bu," "dee di," or "nai nai." Sometimes if a family was multi-lingual, the children would use words for breast in another language such as Spanish (*chi chi*), Polish (*papoo*), or Guanian (*sui sui*). Other times, the word could be related to activities associated with breastfeeding such as "snuggle," "night night," "rock-a-bye," "munchie," "snack," "bishen nuggle," or "hungry." And finally, our personal favorite was "side," as in "do you want the other side"?

These words show the amazing diversity of children's language development, and also give us a glimpse into one of life's more intimate relationships: mother and nursing child.