

Lactation and Breastfeeding with a Disability

Alesha Thomas

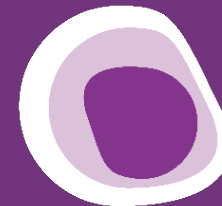
Elizabeth Campbell Soper

Norma Morán

August 6, 2025

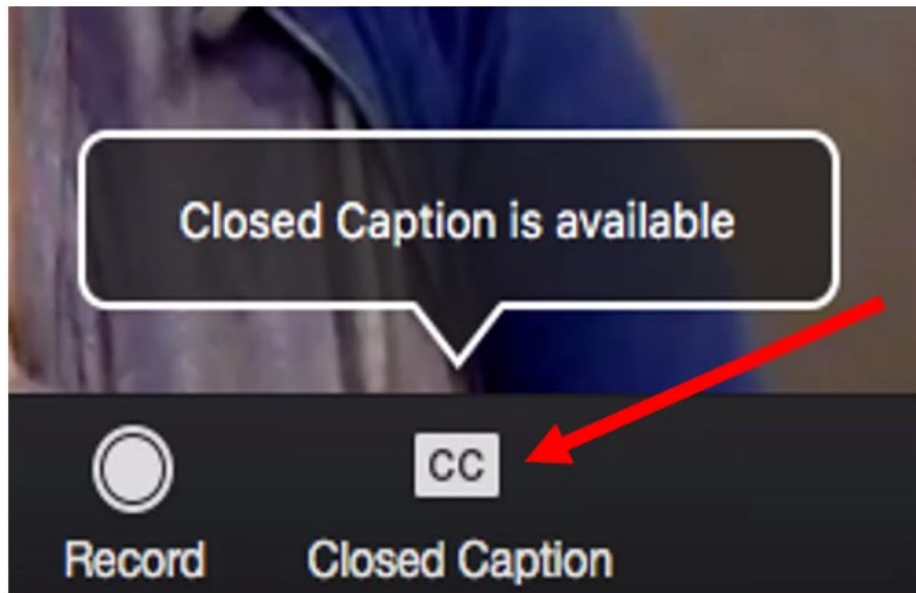
Brandeis

THE HELLER SCHOOL
FOR SOCIAL POLICY
AND MANAGEMENT
Lurie Institute
for Disability Policy



National Center for
**Disability &
Pregnancy Research**

Interpretation and Captioning



Interpreters and presenters will be spotlit.

Please use the chat to notify us of any issues!

Funding



The contents of this presentation were developed under a grant from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR grant number 90DPHF0011). NIDILRR is a Center within the Administration for Community Living (ACL), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of NIDILRR, ACL, or HHS.

LACTATION AND DISABILITY

ALESHA THOMAS, B.S., IBCLC

ABOUT ME

- Nolan was born in March of 2019; at this time, I could not find a lot of resources and supports for parents with disabilities.
- In 2020, during COVID, I started sharing adaptive parenting techniques on YouTube in hopes of getting other parents to contribute content and making a safe space for parents with disabilities.
- In 2021, I applied to a contest from Aerie about how I was making change in the community and how I helped a quadriplegic mother put her twins to bed for the first time. Out of 600 applicants, our idea was selected as the top 20 people to get funded. At that time, we were able to start the non-profit Adaptive Parent Project.



JOURNEY TO BECOMING A LACTATION CONSULTANT

- I have always wanted to have a role in the medical field. After starting my non-profit and having my own experience with breast feeding, I decided I wanted to be able to help parents and children with disabilities on their lactation journeys.
- After completing a health care and safety grant in 2022 with the California State Council for Developmental Disabilities, there was still a deep desire for a clinical role to help people with disabilities.
- The opportunity to take classes virtually to become an IBCLC was available to me, and I decided given my educational background in human biology that it was a great fit.

BECOMING THE PROVIDER I NEEDED

- This gave me the opportunity to use my experience as a parent with a disability to help others with a disability, whether it be the parent or the child.
- Many parents struggle to find the appropriate professional support following delivery. I really wanted to be that safe space that could validate and emphasize the importance of providing services to meet the needs of parents with disabilities.
- I wanted to be able to take my adaptive mindset and help other parents to think outside of the box.

ADVOCACY AND LACTATION

- I believe every parent deserves access to support that honors their abilities, values, and lived experiences.



WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

- There is very little training in healthcare education on providing care to parents with disabilities.
- The transdisciplinary approach to providing supports and resources for parents with disabilities is crucial.

RESOURCES

10



Adaptive Babywearing
Consultations

The Babywearing OT

Jordan Murillo



Wheel Good Motherhood

Free Monthly Peer Support Group

RESOURCES (CONTINUED)

Breastfeeding Help for People with Disabilities

Some people with disabilities might find it hard to breastfeed. But with the right help and information, lots of parents with disabilities can feed their babies this way. Getting breastfeeding help can make your experience better and teach you why it's good for you and your baby.

People Who Can Help

Pick a support person who is easy to talk to and works with people with disabilities. Make sure to ask doctors you're thinking about if they know how to help people who have different needs.

- Lactation Consultants, Counselors, and Support Groups
- Occupational Therapists
- Infant Feeding Specialists
- Pediatricians
- WIC (Women, Infants, & Children) Peer Counselor
- Human Milk Bank

Questions to Ask Your Doctor

- What ways can I feed my baby?
- Can I use both formula and breastmilk?
- Can I pump milk and use a bottle?
- How do I keep milk safe?
- How can I get milk from someone else to give to my baby?
- How can I tell if my baby gets enough milk?
- What ways are good for holding my baby while breastfeeding?
- Are there things that can help make breastfeeding easier for me?
- Can I breastfeed if I'm taking certain medicine?

Costs To Think About

- Your insurance might pay for the breast pump and visits to a breastfeeding professional.
- You might have to pay for things like bottles.
- There may be free breastfeeding groups you can join in your area.
- WIC programs give free breastfeeding help to families who can't afford it.



Photo Credit: @adaptiveparentproject
Image Description: Photo of a woman in a wheelchair breastfeeding an infant using a supportive infant feeding pillow in her lap.

Occupational Therapy Parenting Clinic



UNIVERSITY of ST. AUGUSTINE
for HEALTH SCIENCES
**PRO BONO
CLINICAL EXPERIENCES**



Telehealth service by appointment
Wednesdays 12 PM – 4 PM

*Currently open to CA residents.
More states coming soon!

What We Do:

Help parents with physical, sensory, or cognitive disabilities find practical, empowering solutions to daily challenges.

We Offer Support With:

- Adaptive strategies for home and parenting tasks
- Energy conservation and mobility techniques
- Memory, planning, and organizational skills
- Parenting tools and assistive devices
- Advocacy and resource navigation

Contact us:

Phone: 760-410-5312

Email: alyons-brown@usa.edu

AdaptiveParentProject@gmail.com

THANK YOU

Alesha Thomas

(619)887-4497

adaptiveparentproject@gmail.com

www.adaptiveparentproject.org

[Resources — Adaptive Parent Project](#)



Elizabeth Campbell Soper



Achondroplasia. Advocacy. Access.

Disabled mom, systems thinker, access nerd

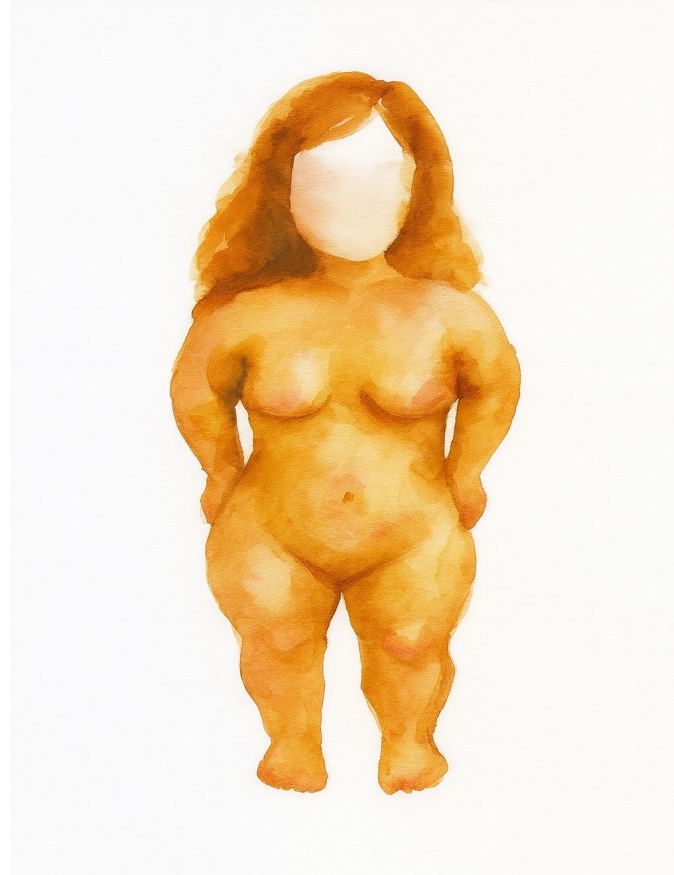
SoCal born and based

Living what I talk about

When the world's not built for you, you plan ten steps ahead just to keep up.

Pregnant and in the Bay Area during COVID-19 lockdown, where restrictions were especially strict.

I had no in-person support and no guide for what this would look like in my body.



AI-generated concept art based on my own proportions (Achondroplasia)

38 weeks pregnant



46-inches tall (116 cm)
37-inch arm span (94 cm)

We've had to adapt our whole lives...



I was learning his body - and relearning mine.



I didn't need pity - I needed someone to ask,
"What works best for you?"
I didn't always know the answer,
but the providers who got creative made all the difference.

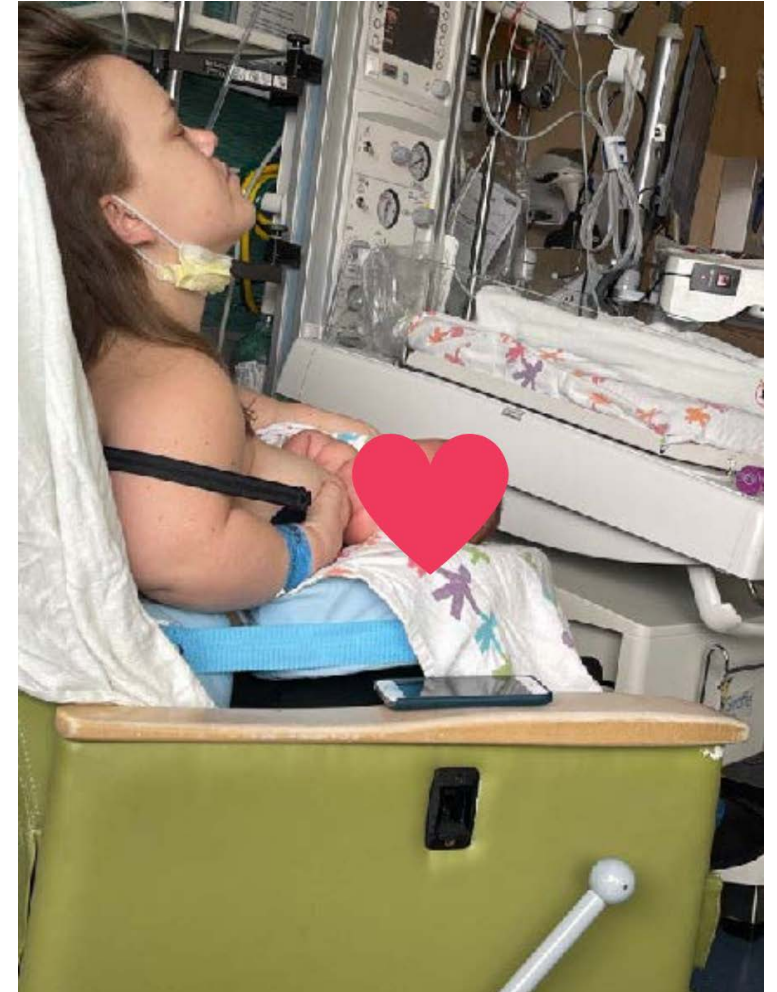
What I wish inpatient providers had known...



Pace feeding with an 8-inch lap



My 7-inch handspan,
2-inch fingers



Supporting my feet, to support my lap

Continued...



Positioning wasn't intuitive - it was adaptive.



His growing strength made nursing easier for both of us.

Supporting at home and in the community...



We made our own ergonomics



Creativity came with us -
highchair under the table





Who all that adapting was for.

Norma Morán



Norma Morán (continued)



DHH Breastfeeding Week



**BREASTFEEDING
WEEK SEPT. 16-22**




*Close the Gap Bridge the Divide:
Establish Breastfeeding Support Access*

Scan me




**DEAF & HARD OF HEARING
BREASTFEEDING WEEK**

*Close the Gap
Bridge the Divide*




VIRTUAL EVENT
SEPTEMBER 16-22, 2025

FOLLOW US: DHHBF | Facebook
DCBFC | Facebook

CONTACT US: dhhbf.info@gmail.com



SCAN ME

Thank You!

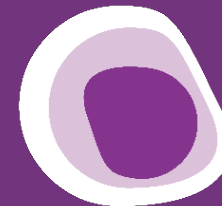
Please take our survey about this webinar.

<https://s.zoom.us/j/bPFinYl2c>



Brandeis

THE HELLER SCHOOL
FOR SOCIAL POLICY
AND MANAGEMENT
Lurie Institute
for Disability Policy



National Center for
**Disability &
Pregnancy Research**

Learn More/Contact Us



Instagram: @DisabilityPregnancy



Facebook.com/LurieInstitute



Lurie.Brandeis.edu



NicoleLomerson@Brandeis.edu

Brandeis

THE HELLER SCHOOL
FOR SOCIAL POLICY
AND MANAGEMENT
Lurie Institute
for Disability Policy