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PREFACE

As a new mother, you're in the midst of the biggest transition of your life. You've been entrusted with a tiny, fragile human life, and decisions you make now can have long-range effects. If you're feeling a bit tearful, know that you are not alone. Most mothers face similar fears. Their heart's desire is to be good mothers, and they wonder if they will ever measure up. The last thing they need is problems breastfeeding.

If you've picked up this book, either breastfeeding is not working and you want to know why or you've heard the horror stories and are now scared to death. You feel that you "should" breastfeed because we all know "breast is best"; however, you're not sure if you're up for weeks of agony. I can't say I blame you.

In a perfect world, I'd love to see breastfeeding go well for all mothers right from the start, that they had support throughout their journeys, and that they reached their breastfeeding goals. However, this is the real world, and our lives rarely go according to plan. It's so different from how you imagined it. Here's what I want you to know: Breastfeeding can be challenging, especially in the beginning, but challenging is way different from impossible.

Where this book differs from others on the market is that I am focusing on *you*. If breastfeeding currently sucks, let's fix it. You

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should not have to suffer to feed your baby. I'm not going to talk much about why breastfeeding is good for your baby. There are tons of good books out there covering that topic (and you probably know that bit by heart). Instead, I am going to talk a lot about why breastfeeding is good for you.

Mothering rhetoric tends to gravitate to one of two positions with regard to caring for your baby. The first position is that everything is about the baby and that mothers should endure even weeks of severe pain. I've been at conferences where I've heard that if you're not responding to every baby sound, *you're damaging your baby's brain*. Wow, that's intense! It's also not true. It is especially important to answer your baby's cries because that's your baby's only way to communicate with you, but there is a bit of give in the system that can allow you to finish going to the bathroom. (Although few will say this publicly, there are many mothers who have nursed their babies while sitting on the toilet.)

At the other extreme, some advisors will make postpartum entirely about the mother. This approach promotes a lot of mother-baby separation and nonresponsive care. One mental health provider that I know uses cognitive therapy to teach mothers not to respond to their babies. That's not great either.

There is a third way: It is possible to take good care of yourself while caring for your baby. The fact is that your newborn is highly vulnerable and needs you. There will be a period of time when your baby's needs trump yours. However, that doesn't mean you should get lost in the process; your needs are important too.

We'll talk a lot about the importance of responsive care throughout this book. That means that when your baby cries, you come. It also means that when your baby wants to engage, you play (this is when the joy happens). However, this also means that you can safely put your baby on a blanket on the floor or in their car seat

if you need to use the bathroom. It is possible to take good care of yourself while caring for your baby.

WHAT CAN MAKE BREASTFEEDING SUCK?

In the course of my travels, I've spoken with thousands of new mothers and the health care providers who work with them. Some things have definitely improved in terms of breastfeeding support, but there are still far too many mothers falling through the cracks. In the process of writing this book, I developed a brief survey that included 361 mothers from my Facebook page. It wasn't a formal study; I wanted to get a sense of the current breastfeeding landscape and what mothers were encountering. Most of these mothers had had successful breastfeeding experiences, which meant that they met their breastfeeding goals and breastfed for as long as they wanted. Yet the majority had experienced challenges in the first few weeks.

By far, the most common problem was painful latch, with 57% reporting this. Thirty-nine percent of mothers said that breastfeeding was exhausting, and another 39% worried about whether their babies were getting enough to eat. Thirty-five percent reported postpartum anxiety, and 23% had postpartum depression. Other common problems included a delay in their milk "coming in" (21%), low milk supply (22%), too much milk (23%), that they didn't know how to latch their baby (23%), 25% had to supplement, and 24% had a breast infection or yeast infection. Thirty-two percent had a baby with tongue-tie, 16% said their baby cried a lot, and 22% said their baby was not gaining well.

There is so much information out there. You may not know what to do next. As you look ahead, think of me as your gigantic bodyguard. My job is to walk you through the gauntlet of paparazzi shouting comments at you. Effective bodyguards shield their clients

as they get them to safety. That is what I hope to do for you. With that in mind, here's I want for you:

- *To be pain-free.* Please don't listen to the voices who will tell you that pain is "normal." I know that many mothers experience it, but that makes it common, not normal. Pain is an important signal from your body. As my friend and breast-feeding medicine specialist Dr. Tina Smillie says, "If you have a rock in your shoe, you stop and take the rock out. You don't figure out how to walk with the rock."

Unfortunately, mothers in pain think that pain means they are doing it "wrong." Many things can cause pain that have nothing to do with how you are doing it. For example, it could be an infection or something inside your baby's mouth. If you are experiencing pain, I want you to have the information you need to problem-solve or find the help you need.

- *To be confident.* I want you to know for sure that your baby is getting enough to eat—from you. If there is a problem, I want you to know how to spot it and what to do about it. You are amazing, and so is your body.

As a new mother, you will receive a lot of advice, and when it comes to that, it's okay to listen to your gut. Lactation is largely a clinical field. Our evidence base is growing, but practice often precedes evidence. With different aspects of care, you'll find a lot of "true believers." If what they are telling you to do does not sit right with your gut, it doesn't matter how many people recommend it—you don't have to do it. Just because someone is adamant doesn't mean they are right, and "I tried it and it worked" is not evidence. What people recommend may help you too, but feel free to gather more information before you proceed, and then you may decide to ignore it altogether.

- *To feel in control.* So many things can happen in women's lives that are beyond our control. I've outlined some of the obstacles that you may run into in your breastfeeding journey. Unfortunately, obstacles are part of life. Can you overcome them? My response is a resounding *yes*. While breastfeeding is natural, it is also learned. If it's learned, then you and your baby can learn it.
- *To protect and support your mental health.* I don't want you struggling. I am a board-certified lactation consultant and a psychologist. You will never, ever hear from me "Just keep on breastfeeding, no matter what!" Mothers I've worked with over the years have run into that kind of advice, and it's so wrong. I don't want you in misery for weeks (or days). That's not good for anyone.

Conversely, I don't agree with providers who will tell you to chuck breastfeeding as if it doesn't matter, without any attempt to fix the problem. If you choose to quit, that's your right, but so often, I hear stories of mothers being told to quit "to protect their mental health." I can't tell you the number of mothers I've spoken with who call me crying because they've just been diagnosed with postpartum depression and were told they need to quit breastfeeding. "And this is the only thing that is going well."

The decision to continue, or not, is yours alone.

I was recently at a conference and heard a speaker say that if a mother is at risk for not breastfeeding, she approaches her and says, "What can I do to help ensure that your baby has human milk?" The mother and her wishes and desires were totally taken out of the equation. That, in a nutshell, is what is wrong with much of the common breastfeeding advice. It's not about the mother at all; she is only the purveyor of the product. Don't get me wrong, your baby is

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super important, but your baby is only one half of the mother–baby couplet. You are a pair, and you’re both important.

I’ll walk you through the breastfeeding basics, but always looking at it through the lens of how breastfeeding affects you. I don’t cover every topic, but where more information is needed, I’ll refer you to other resources. I want to make sure that you have the basic tools you need to have a good breastfeeding experience. I’ll also show you why, physiologically, breastfeeding protects your mental health and the things that might interfere with that protection.

Because of the focus of this book, I cover topics that other books on breastfeeding only touch on, such as postpartum anxiety, depression, and posttraumatic stress disorder. I discuss how your birth experience or previous traumatic events may be influencing your breastfeeding experience. I also cover sleep in some detail because it’s one of the most salient issues for young families. You’ll get a lot of bad advice about sleep, and I’d like to counter it with evidence. I also spend an entire section discussing social support; everyone says you need this, but they are often vague about what it is. Support can be tricky because it involves human relationships, and those by nature are often complicated. What looks like “support” to outsiders may not feel like support to you, and that’s what matters. Finally, I describe what you can do if you cannot reach your breastfeeding goals. If that happens, all is not lost; there are many things you can still do.

You are investing time in mastering a difficult skill. Every bit you do is important for your baby, and it’s also important for you. My goal is to walk you through this time. You deserve respect, to be cared for, and to be listened to—your opinion matters.

Don’t worry so much about doing everything right. Life is messy, and you will make mistakes. But remember that you are your baby’s favorite person. That’s both an honor and a terrifying responsibility.

Let’s begin.