

NICU Nurse Resource Guide

This guide was created by the Connections Program for High-Risk Infants and Families to provide resources to NICU nurses to help them support families during their NICU stay.

Through focus groups with parents and nurses, we identified helpful resources and specific activities that can be completed in the NICU at various phases of the baby's care to promote attachment and confidence in their parenting role.

What we heard from parents

Parents in our focus groups said that they would like to get a welcome and orientation to the NICU including what they can expect to see, what their days might look like (typical cares schedules, doctor's schedules, etc.), and hear some normalizing language around what they might be experiencing.



Caregivers frequently experience the following feelings in the NICU:

- Nervous or scared to see their baby look so small, connected to tubes and wires, having procedures done, etc.
- Grief around the loss of the pregnancy, labor and delivery, and postpartum experience they had envisioned
- Overwhelmed with managing communication with friends and family
- Challenges with feeling like a parent to their baby
- "Waiting for the other shoe to drop" - when you feel as if something "bad" will inevitably happen, even if baby is doing well
- Worried about their baby's medical and developmental prognosis
- Frustrated with a lack of control, lack of concrete answers, etc.
- "Sensory overload" due to all the sights and sounds in the NICU

This handout, the resources mentioned, and more can also be found on our Connections Program for High-Risk Infants and Families website.

Scan the QR code to be directed to our website.



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Mental Health Support

Is the parent looking for long-term support?

Peer Support

To connect with other mothers, dads, or parenting partners currently going through their NICU experience, or who have gone through it in the past, scan the QR code to be directed to resources including virtual support groups and Facebook groups.



Psychologist-led Support

The Connections Program for High-Risk Infants and Families offers psychologist-led therapy groups as well as individual therapy. Scan the QR code to see the steps listed above to get in touch with our team.

Does the parent seem overwhelmed?

Many NICU parents report struggling with feelings of tension or unease. Meditation can help, so the Connections Program has created meditation scripts that parents can use to stay grounded when things get overwhelming in the NICU. These guided meditations promote mindfulness and teach 3 useful skills:

- Box breathing: pace your breathing by pausing after each inhale and exhale, partnered with long, slow breaths
- Guided imagery: imagine a safe and relaxing place you can hold in your mind
- Progressive muscle relaxation: slowly relax each muscle group by focusing on it



Scan the QR code to listen to the guided meditations

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Frequently Asked Questions

We encourage parents to ask questions and advocate for themselves throughout their NICU stay. We have collected some common questions related to parent engagement, confidence, and interactions for you to practice responses with your team.

Parent Engagement and Confidence Questions

- What can I do for my baby?
- How involved can I be in my baby's care?
- Can I read to my baby?
- How can I comfort my baby?
- Can I hold and snuggle my baby?
- Can I take photos of my baby?
- What are some developmental milestones we will be watching for?
- What are some fun memory making activities I can do with my baby?
- What support resources are available for parents?
- How do I know if I have post-partum depression and who can help me with it?
- What is my baby's schedule?
- Can I be part of my baby's rounds?
- Who can visit my baby and at what times?
- How can I leave questions for the providers when I leave bedside?
- How will the providers communicate with me?
- How do I support my other children when my baby is in the NICU?
- What is the NICU roller coaster?
- What is NICUitis?

*Answer succinctly,
with confidence!*

*If you don't know the
answer, tell them how
you (or they) can get
that question
answered*

Scan the QR code to be directed to our website where you can find more questions to be prepared for, as well as suggestions for how to respond to these questions.



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Activities Parents Can Do With Their Baby

It's important for their baby's development to be involved in care and developmental activities. We encourage parents to ask their nurse about how to interact with their baby. This may include "hand hugs", kangaroo care, using a mirror, engaging in cares, as well as activities that aim to increase parental attachment and benefit baby's development.

All About Me

For infants 2+ weeks old

Increasing the caregiver's reflective capacity and internal representations of their baby and themselves in the caregiving role allows for a greater ability to see their baby as a person, not a "medical object". This activity aims to increase feelings of attachment and reflective capacity by thinking through baby's likes and dislikes, and viewing the baby as an individual. While the medical team knows the baby well, this allows the parent to showcase their special perspective. Some caregivers prefer to fill this out over time, as they are still getting to know their little one! It is common to have difficulty thinking through answers at times, and their responses may change over time.



Scan the QR code for more information on activities parents can do with their baby

Setting Routines

For infants 24+ weeks old

Babies can learn patterns and routines over time, so this is a helpful way to teach them about their environment. Routines help with structure and predictability, which are important ways to help young children learn. By creating routines that involve reading, talking, and/or singing, babies are also exposed to more language, which is important for their development. You as a member of the baby's team have already established care times based on their needs, but there are ways parents can add personalized touches to the routine.