

NICU Parent Resource Guide

The Connections Program for High-Risk Infants and Families made this guide to help parents while they are in the NICU with their baby. We talked to other NICU parents about what kind of help they needed during this time and what activities might have helped them to feel more more confident as a parent, and included them in this guide.

Caregivers might experience the following feelings in the NICU:

Note: You may feel all, some, or none of the following throughout your NICU stay as no two journeys are the same.

- Nervous or scared to see your baby look so small, connected to tubes and wires, having doctors and nurses do procedures, etc.
- Feeling sad because things didn't go as planned during pregnancy, labor and delivery, and after the baby was born
- Finding it hard to keep in touch with your friends and family
- Challenges with feeling like a parent to this baby
- “Waiting for the other shoe to drop” - when you feel as if something “bad” will happen, even if baby is doing well
- worried about how your baby is doing medically and if they are developing as they should
- Feeling frustrated because you don't have control over what's happening or you're not getting clear answers
- “Sensory overload” due to all the sights and sounds in the NICU



We recommend that you speak up for yourself and your baby whenever you can

- Both parents play a special and equally important role in helping their baby grow and develop. Being involved in your baby's care and activities is important for their growth and development.
- Ask your nurse about how to interact with your baby. This may include “hand hugs”, skin-to-skin contact, using a mirror, engaging in care times, reading to your baby, etc.
- Please ask questions and ask them as often as you need!

Scan the QR code to the left for more information on common feelings caregivers experience and recommendations



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Feeling overwhelmed?

A lot of parents reported feeling tense or uneasy sometimes. Meditation can be helpful, so we made some meditation scripts for you to use as a tool to help you stay calm when things get tough in the NICU.

Scan the QR code to the right to listen to 2 guided meditations.



These meditations will teach you 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

Passive Muscle Relaxation

slowly relax each muscle group by focusing on it

Note: If at any point you get distracted or find it difficult to relax, that is part of the process. Like any skill, the more you practice, the easier it is to pause thoughts or worries, and focus on the present.

Looking for long-term support?



Peer Support

If you're interested in connecting with other mothers, dads, or parenting partners currently going in the NICU, or who have gone through it in the past, scan the QR code to the left to be directed to resources including virtual peer 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 the left to see the steps listed above to get in touch with our team.

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Activities You Can Do With Your Baby

All About Me

For babies 2+ weeks old

Thinking through your baby's personality and individuality can help increase your attachment and be a positive activity not related to medical care. We created this sheet for you to teach others about your baby. While your baby's medical team certainly knows him/her well, as parents you have special and important knowledge about your baby.

Note: You can fill this out over time or change your responses as your baby grows!



ALL ABOUT ME

My name was chosen because _____
_____.

My caregivers are _____.

I was born on _____.
My caregivers are excited for me to meet _____
_____.

I am _____ old.
I love when _____
_____.

I don't like when _____
_____.

I'm learning how to grow and develop. I'm also learning _____
_____.

I'm really good at _____
_____.

My caregivers love to _____ with me.

My caregivers like to read _____ to me.

Something special about me is _____
_____.


My caregivers want me to know _____
_____.

If I were an animal, I would be a _____.

My theme song would be _____
_____.

My super power would be _____
_____.

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for High-Risk Infants and Families



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Activities You Can Do With Your Baby

Setting Routines *For babies 24+ weeks old*

Babies can learn patterns and routines over time. This can be a good way to teach them about their world. Having a regular routine can help babies feel safe and know what to expect. When you have a routine for reading, talking, or singing with your baby, they get to hear more words, which is important for their development. Your baby's care team already have times for taking care of them, but you can make your own special routine too.



*Routines established in the NICU can be applied to home, helping baby with that transition by increasing familiarity/consistency across settings.
Scan the QR code above to view these activities on our website.*

Sing a Song or Read a Short Book

Doing this before and after a planned care activity can help your baby feel more calm, because they recognize your voice and it comforts them

Goodnight or Goodbye Routine

Some families make a special way to say "goodnight" or "goodbye" as a way to wrap up time together before heading home. This can help parents feel less nervous or worried about leaving their baby for the day.

Reflection

What do you notice about how you feel when you are singing or reading to your baby?

What do you notice about your baby when you are singing or reading to them?

How might you use these routines when you leave 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 the right to be directed to our website.

