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 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.
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.
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!
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.

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.

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.