

Parenting in the NICU

For parents of NICU infants

Parenting is defined as “the attention and love of parents.” Parenting is essential to the well-being of all newborns. Your baby needs **you** – especially while they are in the NICU.

We know you want and need to be close to your baby during this time. **You are welcome to be with your baby 24 hours a day.**

We also know there are times when you’re not able to be here as much as you would like. Please know that the quality of the time you spend in the NICU is more important than the quantity.

How Parenting Looks in the NICU

Parenting your baby in the NICU will evolve as your child progresses. You may start by sitting quietly by your baby’s bedside. Later, your baby may hold your finger in a tiny fist. Or, you may comfort your baby by “containing” your child with your hands.



How you are able to parent your baby will change over time.

Self-care

During this stressful time, we encourage you to take care of yourself, as well as your baby. Be at your baby’s bedside as often as you need, but be aware that you may not be able to rest well in the NICU.

Your baby’s care continues day and night, sometimes every hour or more often. We have a space for you to rest or sleep in your baby’s room, but it may be more restful to return to your own home to rest and recover.

Your baby’s health and safety are our top priority – but your health and safety are also a priority! We support you, both in parenting and in self-care, so that you can stay healthy and rested for your infant.



“Kangaroo care is so important. It helps the babies thrive. My husband did kangaroo care, too. There were days when Kylie was held for many hours. This made me feel close to her.”

-- Kylie's Mom

Kangaroo Care: Skin-to-skin Contact

Kangaroo care is the practice of babies having skin-to-skin contact with their parents for long periods of time. During kangaroo care, the baby is:

- Naked except for a diaper
- Held upright on the parent's chest
- Covered with a blanket

Usually, mothers and fathers “wear” their babies for 2 to 3 hours at a time. Talk with your nurse about best timing for you to do kangaroo care.

Research shows that babies benefit in many ways during skin-to-skin care:

- Breathing, heart rate, and oxygen saturation levels are more stable during kangaroo care.
- Babies stay warm because the parent's body helps regulate the baby's body temperature.
- Babies sleep better, which leads to improved growth.
- Mothers who give kangaroo care and are breastfeeding produce more milk.
- Parents report less anxiety and feel more comfortable caring for their infants.

Kangaroo care can also:

- Help with bonding and attachment
- Improve digestion
- Help fight infections
- Promote brain growth

What Parents Say About Kangaroo Care

“I love my kangaroo care time with Henry. As a dad, it can be hard finding a way to contribute directly to his progress. Kangaroo care is the best way I have found to help him grow while building a bond with him.”

Nate (father of NICU baby)

“Holding your baby for the first time is an overwhelming experience, no matter what the circumstances surrounding the moment. Joy, comfort, hope; each moment generates a different emotion. Kangaroo care builds an immeasurable bond, a lasting connection between parent and baby that elicits memories that cannot be put into words.”

Gretchen (mother of NICU baby)

What to Bring to the NICU from Home

You may find it useful to have these items during your time in the NICU:

- Laptop computer or notebook (the hospital has wireless internet access)
- MP3 player, iPod, DVD player, or other small electronics
- Books, magazines, and small handcrafts such as knitting or crochet
- Your own toothbrush, toothpaste, shampoo, body wash, and other toiletries
- Your own pillow, comforter or quilt, or other items to make you comfortable



“To survive the NICU, try to get out of the room, go on walks, or go to Art Group.

-- Austin’s Mom

“Art Group helped me cope with the NICU experience.”

-- Wyatt’s Mom

Library, Classes, and Support Groups

- The NICU has a small library with educational children’s books. Feel free to borrow them. Please return them when you are done with them so other families can use them.
- Next door to the Family Lounge is the NICU classroom. We hold a variety of daily classes to educate you on your baby’s care. Please see the schedule of classes posted on bulletin boards in the Family Lounge and outside the classroom.
- There are also many support groups, such as the Art Group, that NICU parents and families can attend. Please see the bulletin board just outside the Family Lounge.

