

Nurturing in the NICU

Thriving Babies...Thriving Families



Supporting infant development in
the Newborn Intensive Care Unit



Adapted from Children's Hospital at Providence

Our goal is *“Thriving Babies and Thriving Families.”*

Dear NICU Parents,

Did you know that YOU make a big difference in your baby’s development? Your presence and touch in the NICU is the most important part of your baby’s care.

This guide will offer some of the best ways to be involved with your baby, and why. If you have further questions and would like more instruction, please reach out to your baby's NICU team.



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All Things Kangaroo



Touch & Sleep

Positive touch is very important in the NICU. There are many ways you can give touch.

Hand Hugs

Hand hugs or encircled holding provides containment for your baby. This can help your baby feel safe and more comfortable. If kangaroo care isn't possible yet, this is the next best thing!



Massage

Infant massage has many benefits and is great for babies older than 32 weeks gestation. If you want to learn how to provide massage for your baby, contact your baby's neonatal team.



Sleep

Memory, senses, and emotional learning skills all require sleep to develop. Learn your baby's awake and sleep state to help protect their sleep and know when to interact.



Kangaroo Care provides optimal support for your infants development.

Taste and Smell

Taste and smell are some of the first senses your baby develops. By 28 weeks gestation, your baby can recognize familiar smells. Taste and smell can be a great comfort to your baby. Positive taste, like breast milk, can actually act like a pain reliever!

Scent cloths

Wear these against your skin (mom & dad) so your scent will transfer. Leave next to your baby when you need to step out. Try not to introduce strong smells such as perfumes, cleaners, or smoke.



Oral Immune Therapy (OIT)

OIT is giving your baby tiny tastes of breast milk. This helps build your baby's immune system, prepare their tummy and reduce pain and stress. Hold the taste at the corner of your baby's mouth and wait for your baby to open their mouth. Then introduce the taste into their mouth. This will make it a welcome and positive experience.



Kangaroo Care helps your baby learn your smell and can reduce pain, stress and ease their way to eating.

Hearing and Vision

Paying attention to sound and vision is very important in the NICU. You can learn your baby's stress signs to know when they start to get overwhelmed.

Vision

Preemies have very immature vision. When they are early, we want to limit their exposure to light by keeping their eyes covered and room lights dimmed.

Babies can see shapes and faces close to their original due date.



Hearing

Premature and sick babies are extremely sensitive to sound. The best sound is your voice against a quiet background. We use Sonicu sound measuring system in the rooms, via the light box in the ceiling, to help remind everyone to keep sounds low. Please silence your cell phone and wear headphones when watching the television.



Kangaroo Care puts your baby next to your heart beat...and that's a beautiful sound!

Stress and Pain

In the NICU, we work hard to reduce pain and stress. These two things have a huge impact on your baby's developing brain. Your baby will do better *with your support* during routine cares, blood draws, IV's, suction, removing and adjusting equipment.

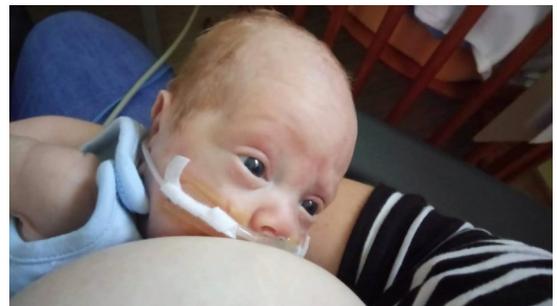
Positive Touch

Make a plan to hold your baby during stressful or painful procedures.

If holding is not possible, then supporting them in a tucked position, with hand hugs is the next best thing!

Breast Milk

Sucking and taste also decreases pain. When possible, your breast milk is best. Tastes of breast milk, or breastfeeding during cares and procedures is an excellent way to support your baby.



Each day, talk with your baby's nurse to plan for upcoming procedures so you can be present and support your baby.

Comforting Your Baby

As a parent, you are a significant part of your baby's comfort. Here are things you can do before, during and after painful or stressful procedures to improve your baby's experience.

- Hold your baby skin to skin or swaddled, if possible. It is best to start 10 to 15 minutes before the procedure and continue during and after procedures.
- If breastfeeding is an option, start 2 to 5 minutes before the procedure and continue throughout procedures.
- Offer a pacifier
- If possible, dim overhead lights.
- Talk or sing softly to your baby.
- If your baby is 34 weeks gestation, soft music or a mobile may be another option.
- If baby will tolerate, gentle rocking or swaying motions often help settle.



I can help my baby.

I can help my baby today by asking these questions:

- When can I hold my baby?
- What time will cares be today?
- How can I help with cares?
- What is a hand hug?
- What can I do to help my baby's brain develop?
- When can I attend rounds and ask questions about the plan of care?

I can care for my baby by:

- Hold your baby as much as you can. It helps their brain get stronger!
- Read, sing or talk softly to your baby
- Provide oral care
- Change your baby's diaper
- If possible, provide your breast milk
- Learning and responding to my baby's cues.
- Read your baby's care plan, routine care list and flip chart.

I can help myself by:

- Getting enough to eat and resting.
- When needed, take a break. Go for a walk, get coffee, breathe.
- Look for support within the NICU. Ask your nurse about family support groups in your hospital. For additional resources see FPQC's PAIRED Initiative on line toolkit.

Kangaroo Care

Kangaroo care or skin-to-skin could be considered the best positive touch you can provide in the NICU. It is a practice that we wholeheartedly encourage and support. It is our favorite! Here are some of the benefits that kangaroo care has.



Skin-to-Skin or Kangaroo Care helps babies...

- ◆ Have longer times of deep sleep.
- ◆ Decrease the amount of time they spend crying.
- ◆ Gain weight faster and more consistently.
- ◆ Have more success breast feeding.
- ◆ Have a decreased risk of infection.
- ◆ Brain development.
- ◆ Have lower stress levels
- ◆ Have shorter NICU stays and earlier discharge dates!

Kangaroo care benefits ALL babies, premature and full term.

A doctor once said “the two most important things for NICU babies are parents and kangaroo care.”

Kangaroo care helps parents too. Below are just some of the ways that skin-to-skin can help parents.

- ◆ Helps mothers with milk supply.
- ◆ Enhances bonding between both parents.
- ◆ The mother’s body will instinctively warm or cool according to what her baby needs.
- ◆ Mothers have reported feeling stronger, more energetic, content, clear-headed and happy!
- ◆ Decreases post-partum depression



Kangaroo care is for everyone!

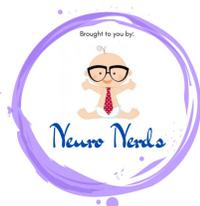
Want to learn more?

The NICU has a team specialized with training in developmental care. We are all here to help you nurture your baby in the NICU.

Our neonatal specialists can write a personalized care plan for your baby. This plan helps you and staff know some of the best ways to support your baby while in the NICU. They will also give recommendations and support for when you leave the NICU.

Please don't hesitate to ask for more information on ways you can support your baby. We have a variety of methods that can help. This can be in the form of information shared with you at the bedside, articles, or one-on-one training.

You can also check out the Florida Perinatal Quality Collaborative website to get more information on routine care and how to do a kangaroo care standing transfer. Just open your camera app and point it at the code.



Adapted from the NICU Neuro Nerds
A Quality Improvement Team from Alaska
Providence NICU Family Team