

Welcome to the Shannon Medical Center NICU!

Having an infant in the NICU can be unpredictable and difficult for the whole family. Sometimes caregivers feel torn between self-care, care of their new infant, and care of their other family members, especially if they have other children. Be gentle with yourself, you are doing the best you can in a difficult situation. You are the most important person to your children, and taking good care of yourself allows you to continue to care well for them.

Care for Yourself By:

- Eating and drinking regularly.
- Sleeping when you can.
- Getting outside for fresh air.
- Utilizing healthy support systems.
- Taking time to do some relaxing things for you.
- Pumping pods are available. Ask for assistance from nursing or lactation staff for information on use.
- If you need support, reach out to the Child Life Department.

How to Support Infants in the Special Care Nursery:

- A calm and quiet NICU environment benefits all infants. Some infants are especially susceptible to loud noises, voices, and media. Please assist in maintaining a therapeutic environment.
- Frequent visits from caregivers.
- Scent lovies placed close to infants, providing them the comforting scent of their loved ones.
- Being held, especially skin to skin or gently touched if unable to hold skin to skin.
- Being talked to, sung to, or read to. Books are provided on the white cart at the sink station.
- Being provided with support during procedures.
- Please see the Position of Comfort posters located in the nursery for information specific to supporting during medical procedures.
- Caregivers providing feedings once started .

Sibling Support

Including siblings in the NICU experience is important for family development, but comes with some unique challenges due to the nature of the NICU environment and the special needs of infants. Some siblings may struggle with:

- Confusion about where infant is and what is happening.
- Difficult or confusing feelings about the new infant's needs or health.
- Fear about becoming ill themselves or others becoming ill.
- Stress related to witnessing the stress experienced by other family members.
- Disruption to routine.
- Difficulty with separation from caregivers.
- Missing out on not getting to know their new sibling.
- Adjustment to a new family member such as feelings of jealousy, anger, or loneliness.



Common Behaviors of Siblings May Include:

- Being easily upset.
- Misbehaving, which is often due to overwhelming emotions.
- Increased clinginess or demanding behaviors.
- Disruptions in eating and/or sleeping.
- Regressive behaviors such as wetting pants or sucking thumb.
- Struggling in school.
- Refusal to talk about or disinterest in talking about new infant.

Open and honest conversations about the infant needing to be in a special part of the hospital called the NICU are encouraged. The following books can assist with discussions and with answering questions; or a Child Life specialist can assist in conversations and supporting the whole family, including siblings.

My Sister is a Premie* or My Brother is a Premie*

- These books are helpful in explaining why a baby has to stay in the hospital and what is being done for him or her. This is especially helpful before siblings see the infant for the first time.

An Invisible String*

- This book is helpful for explaining that even when we are apart from those we love, we are always connected by our love for one another.

**Available for your family in the lobby outside of the special care nursery. Please return them to the book slot for other families to use after reading.*

Helpful Tips for Siblings

- Children understand verbal communication far sooner than they can express information verbally. Therefore, simple information should be shared with even very young children.
- Bring siblings to see the baby. NICU window viewings can be arranged on occasion, depending on the status of the unit, with nursing and/or Child Life staff.
- Frequent updates about the infant's progress can be beneficial as can sharing pictures with explanations of the equipment being used to help the infant. When clear information is not regularly communicated in developmentally appropriate ways, children's anxiety can grow.
- Sharing prognosis information can assist in decreasing anxiety and setting expectations. For example, you may say, "Baby B will get to come home when they can breathe well enough to not need help breathing and can drink all of their bottles. The doctors think this will be in 3 weeks, but it may take longer. I will keep you updated on information."
- Scheduling special time with the siblings and caregivers.
- Keeping consistency of schedules and caregivers whenever possible. If family or friends are helping to care for siblings at home, it is recommended to have the same caregivers.
- Sometimes children will think it is their fault that the infant needs to stay in the NICU. They do not always share these feelings. Please reassure them they did nothing wrong, and it is not their fault the infant needs to be in the NICU for extra help.

Some parents of infants in the NICU have found the following website helpful:

<https://handtohold.org/nicu-family-support/educational-resources-for-nicu-parents/>

Our Child Life Department provides emotional and educational support to families and their children. The Child Life specialist can be reached at 325-747-6198 or elizabethbailey@shannonhealth.org.

