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Bonding with Your Baby in the NICU

It is possible that you did not get to touch, let alone hold, your baby in the delivery room, and now you worry that you've lost that chance to bond with your baby.

We want to assure you that's not true. There are many ways to bond with your baby in the NICU!

Bonding is a process

Bonding looks different for every family. Each baby and each situation is unique. How you bond with your baby will depend on several things – your baby's gestation (how early they were born), their diagnosis and their specific medical needs. Let your baby's care team know that you want to take an active role in your baby's care and ask them to help guide you.

Holding and bonding with your baby

Bonding with your NICU baby can seem challenging at first, when all you see is the medical equipment separating you. Try not to be intimidated. You can overcome the barriers between you and your baby. Watch the staff and follow their example of how to safely hold and care for your baby. Be sure to ask about:

Skin-to-skin and kangaroo care

Both moms and dads can bond with baby in this way. Spend as much time as you can holding your baby against your skin. Besides being a great way to bond, kangaroo care helps your baby regulate their breathing, keeps them warm, helps them learn muscle control and calms them. It can also help

increase milk production for mom if she is breastfeeding or pumping. Even if your baby is not breastfeeding, you can still hold them skin-to-skin while they are taking their feedings.

Gentle touch

When you are unable to hold your baby, you can still touch them. Place your hand gently over them. Hold their hand or foot. This lets your baby know you are there and brings you closer together.

The right position for your baby

Your baby's nurses and therapists can help you understand what your baby needs to support their growing brain and body. For example, they can show you how to create soft boundaries around your baby that help them feel more comfortable and contained like when they were in the womb.

How to give your baby what they want

When you're with your baby, pay close attention to their likes and dislikes. The more time you spend together the more you will learn about their unique personality and preferences. Then teach people about your baby. Sharing what you see will help the doctors and nurses give your baby better care.

Other ways to bond with your NICU baby

Talk to them

Your baby knows your voice. Speak to them. Sing to them. Read to your baby.

Leave your scent

Your baby loves your smell. Leave a special blanket or scent cloth with your baby when you have to be apart.

Bring home to the hospital

Even though your baby isn't home yet, you can make their NICU space more like home. Bring family photos, a special blanket or artwork from siblings to decorate their space.

You and your baby are on the amazing journey of getting to know each other. Remember that bonding is a process, and once you and your baby leave the NICU, you will find new ways to strengthen your special bond, together.



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