# Parenting in the NICU: Information for Parents

Having a baby born very early or sick can be distressing for parents. The neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) can be a scary place because of all of the sounds and machines that are used. You may have many overwhelming feelings about your baby being sick: you may be feeling sad, guilty, scared, or worried about your baby and what is going to happen. Mothers and fathers often have many of the same feelings about having a sick baby, but they will show those feelings differently—and that’s OK. Be patient with each other. It’s OK to ask questions—and you can ask the same question again if you don’t under- stand or don’t remember the answer.

At first, your baby may be too sick to hold, and noise and lights may be too much for him or her. One way you can help your baby is to gently touch or talk to him or her in a quiet voice. You play a very important role in your baby’s care and ongoing development. Your presence at the bedside is very comforting to your baby, who knows your voice

and scent. Your voice can help your baby be calm so he or she can grow and get better. Once your baby is feeling better, the nurse will show you how to place your hands on your infant to help your baby feel secure.

As your baby feels better, the nurse will let you know when to help with your baby’s care. Being involved in your baby’s NICU care will help you feel more comfortable caring for your baby once you go home. There are many ways you can interact with your baby during the NICU stay, including talking, reading, and singing. You can change your baby’s diaper, take his or her temperature, and possibly hold your baby. You also can give your baby skin-to- skin care, called *kangaroo care*. This will help you get to know your baby and help your baby be calm and quiet.

As your baby gets bigger and stronger, you will get to hold your baby more and feed him or her. When your baby is able to do these things, you are one step closer to going home!