



Getting Information from the Healthcare Team

A family-centered approach to care in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) has been shown to have a positive impact on outcomes. These include lower levels of parental stress, improved confidence in decision making, and increased trust in the healthcare team (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2012; Hendricks-Muñoz & Prendergast, 2014; Williams, 2016). In addition, parents who are included in direct patient care are less likely to suffer from depression and anxiety often associated with having an infant in the NICU (Obeidat, Bond, & Callister, 2009).

Upon the infant's admission to the NICU, parents should be presented with a list of opportunities to participate in the routine care of their infant, such as holding, changing, feeding, and bathing. Avoid giving parents a list of rules and restrictions, but instead provide guidelines on hand-washing, visits from family and friends, etc. Explain that parents are not considered visitors but instead are vital members of the healthcare team who work together with healthcare providers to promote healthy outcomes for their infant while in the NICU.

Having an infant in the NICU can be one of the most emotionally stressful times in a parent's life. The healthcare team should encourage activities such as *kangaroo care* (KC), an evidence-based practice benefitting both the infant and parent that meets the infant's needs for warmth, love, and contact. KC has the potential to decrease stress by replacing it with a wonderful experience that only the parent can provide (Gabriels, Brouwer, Maat, & Hoogen, 2015).

Each member of the NICU should consider the unit's physical layout and ability to maintain confidentiality when determining how best to include parents in rounds and to exchange information about their infant. Parents should be recognized as both experts on and advocates for their child.

The following are suggestions for parental participation:

- Encourage parents to learn as much as possible about their infant's health and medical condition.
- Encourage parents to perform KC.
- Encourage parents to be involved in direct care as much as possible, reminding them that they are their infant's most consistent caregivers.
- Encourage parents to ask questions and include them in patient care rounds and reports when possible.
- Encourage parents to keep a journal and to write down additional questions as they log daily activities.
- Encourage parents to take time to care for themselves.

References

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Getting Information from the Healthcare Team: Information for Parents

As parents, you are the most important people in your baby's life and in their care. Your baby's healthcare team needs you to help provide your baby's care. There are many ways that you can do this:

- Come to the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) as soon as you can after your baby is born. Get to know your baby. Help us learn about his or her patterns, likes, dislikes, and communication. Let your baby hear your voice and feel your touch—they are comforting and familiar to your baby.
- Learn what care you can provide for your infant (for example, taking his or her temperature, diaper changes, bathing, feeding, and calming your baby).
- If the healthcare team uses words you don't understand, ask for an explanation.
- Talk with your baby's caregivers often. It helps to write down questions, anything that worries you, or things about your baby to share. Talk with your baby's bedside nurse and the doctor or nurse practitioner.
- Learn everything you can about your baby's strengths and differences.
- Talk to your baby's provider or nurse about when you can start kangaroo care. This is a special type of

holding in which your infant is placed on your bare chest and covered with a blanket. Many studies have shown benefits for both baby and parent from this type of holding. Kangaroo care provides warmth, love, and comfort to your baby and should happen daily when your baby is stable.

In this unit, the best way/time to participate is _____.

We ask that you respect the privacy of other babies and not ask questions about them or discuss them with others.

It's important to take care of yourself, because your baby needs you. Spend time talking with your family and friends each day. Discuss your feelings and concerns. Find friends or family who can help with other daily tasks or offer support. It might help to talk to a social worker or chaplain. Tell the staff if you are having difficulty eating or sleeping.

Don't forget to ask your NICU team for information about support groups or websites that might be helpful.