

Bonding with Your Baby

What to expect

You may not have been able to share your baby's first few minutes of life in the way that you had planned. When this happens, many parents worry that they have lost their chance to bond with their baby.

Your chance to bond is **not** lost if your birth experience was different than you expected. There are many ways you and your baby can bond while in the NICU.



Bonding can happen at many stages of your baby's development.

What will bonding with my baby be like?

Bonding looks different for every family. It is a very emotional and personal process. How bonding occurs will even vary among members of your family.

How you bond with your baby also depends on physical factors, such as your baby's gestational age and stability, and your own health. Some babies cannot be touched or held right away, while others can. Ask your baby's care team what is best for your baby at each phase of their growth and development.

How can I help the bonding process?

Here are some ways to help increase the bond you have with your baby:

Care for Yourself

- **Take care of yourself so you can take care of your baby.** Babies can tell whether you are stressed or relaxed. It helps bonding if you are calm, relaxed, and well rested when you visit.
- **Know what you're feeling.** Take deep breaths and check in with your emotions. Try to be aware of what you are feeling, and do your best to accept all of the feelings you have. When you are in tune with what is going on with you, it is easier to be in tune with your baby.



“The very first day of his life, we began a ritual that we have continued his entire life – we read books to him every day. It gave me something to do that felt like I was connecting with him, that felt like I was doing something.”

-- Layne's Mom

“The first time I laid eyes on our babies was a very surreal and emotional moment. My babies looked so frail and lifeless with tubes and wires all over them. These babies I couldn't keep inside me were now my reality.”

-- Timmy and Tessie's Mom

Questions?

Your questions are important. Talk with a member of your baby's healthcare team if you have questions or concerns.

Neonatal Intensive Care Unit:
206.598.4606

Use Touch to Bond

- Ask your nurse about the best ways to touch your baby. The answer will depend on your baby's gestational age and medical condition.
- Holding your baby skin-to-skin (“kangaroo care”) creates an emotional and physical bond with your baby. It is also good for your baby's health.
- When you are not able to hold your baby, your touch lets your baby know you are there. Always touch your baby gently.
- If touching your baby is not possible, let your baby know you are there by placing your hands somewhere close to your baby.
- Notice what your baby likes and dislikes. This will help you know when they are most comfortable and ready to be touched.

Other Ways to Bond

- Visit your baby as often as you can.
- Bring pieces of your life into your baby's hospital room so they become a part of your baby's life, too. These could be items from your baby's room at home, a special blanket, pictures of family members, or other small items.
- Talk with your nurse about the best times to make eye contact and talk softly to your baby.
- Leave items that have your smell on them close to your baby's space. Always check with the nurse first if you want to put something very close to your baby.

Overcoming Barriers

All the medical equipment in the NICU can seem to keep you apart from your baby. Please try to overlook those barriers. You can learn new ways to bond even with all the equipment, ways you may not have thought about before.

Use the suggestions in this handout to get to know your new family member. You are just beginning your journey together, and hopefully the NICU will only be a small part of it.

Resource: Hand to Hold's *Bonding with Your Medically Fragile Baby*
Resource Library