

Tips for staff in the neonatal unit



Having a baby in the neonatal unit is an overwhelming experience that can cause emotional stress for parents. In addition to all the usual postpartum issues, parents are often confronted with enormous anxiety around their baby's health. This stress and trauma can be reduced significantly with the right support from staff.

That's why we've created this guide to help health professionals understand the parents' perspective. Here are some suggestions of things you can do to support parents on their journey through the neonatal unit:

PROVIDE A WELCOMING AND SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT BY...

- creating a setting where parents can talk and support one another.
- introducing yourself to the parents, letting them know you will be caring for their baby while they are in the neonatal unit.
- asking parents what they like to be called (some may not like to be called 'Mum'/'Dad').
- providing a tour of the nursery so parents know where everything is.
- offering a privacy screen when parents are trying to breastfeed their baby.
- informing the parents you are about to touch their child.
- consulting the parents as much as possible e.g. if taking blood or giving an injection to their baby.
- advising the parents that you will be relocating the baby within the hospital ahead of time.
- understanding that parents may call multiple times a day to check in on their baby.
- being kind to the parents when they call - sometimes the phone is their only connection to their baby.
- not projecting your personal views (philosophies, religion or ethics) onto the parents.
- avoiding making assumptions about the parents or family if they are unable to visit regularly.

OFFER EMOTIONAL SUPPORT BY...

- reassuring parents that it is common to feel a mix of emotions.
- offering to send a photo of the baby to the mother when a C-section prevents her from getting out of bed.
- engaging in conversations on topics other than the baby to help them feel at ease.
- congratulating the parents on their baby's milestones.
- avoiding telling parents how they should be feeling.
- avoiding being dismissive and diminishing parents' concerns.
- reassuring parents that it is okay to be anxious to touch or hold their baby.

EMPOWER AND ENCOURAGE BY...

- promoting the benefits of breastfeeding while also supporting those who are unable for whatever reason.
- trusting the parents intuition about their child and acknowledging their concerns.
- allowing parents to hold their baby as soon as possible, while also respecting if they are not ready for this.
- allowing parents to ask questions and providing honest information and clear explanations.
- updating parents when tests are being done and what they're for. Also advising if any scheduled tests/procedures have been cancelled and why.
- encouraging parents to read their baby's chart.
- letting parents know when they can speak with their baby's doctor.

EDUCATE AND GUIDE BY...

- teaching parents how to touch their baby in a soothing way.
- helping parents to do kangaroo care.
- involving parents in caring for their baby, e.g. bathing, changing and feeding.
- informing parents of the schedule so they can attend feedings, baths, weighings and isolette changes.
- providing access to as much information as possible.
- simplifying medical language and information so it is easier to understand.



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