

Getting to Know Your Baby



Getting to know your baby is an important early step in you and your baby's journey, but it can initially be daunting in the environment of the neonatal unit and with a baby who is unwell or born early. Whilst your baby is on the neonatal unit, you will be playing a key role in the team. An important part of this is discovering your baby's unique behaviours, their likes and dislikes, and letting others know so they can support you in caring for them in the best ways.

Here are suggestions for how to get started in the first days and weeks.

Watching and Wondering with Your Baby

You might already be doing a lot of 'baby watching' from close and afar - this is great. Watch your baby's face, their body, their arms, hands, legs and toes. When you are watching your baby, come up close, breathe deeply yourself and try to be in the moment with your baby. Then, 'wonder' about what you are seeing.

- What are their likes and dislikes
- What are their reactions to your voice and other's
- When do they look more awake
- How do they move during cares
- What are their reactions to changes to their environment

This will help you to get to know your baby - if they feel ok, or if they need extra support or a break. You will gradually see patterns over time and be able to tell others what to expect.

Let them hear your voice, feel your touch and smell your smell.

You are your baby's home. Your voice and your smell are familiar and comforting. Your still, steady touch is reassuring. Some of the ways you may like to connect with your baby are to:

- Use a scent cloth or muslin that has your smell, placed near their head
- Talk softly with them and tell them about your day and let them hear your voice during cares
- Offer your finger for them to grasp
- Give them a 'hand hug'
- Start daily skin to skin with support

Your baby's nurse or neonatal therapist will be able to help build your confidence in how to provide important comforting touch for your baby.

Recognising and responding to your baby's cues

When you spend time watching your baby, you will have seen them use lots of 'cues' to tell you how they are feeling in different situations. These maybe in their facial expressions, their heart rate and breathing, their skin colour, their movements or whether they are able to stay awake or not . By understanding what your baby is saying through these behaviours, you will know when they are feeling ok, or when they need more support.

Here are a few behaviours to look out for:

'I'm feeling content'

- Relaxed facial expression
- Opening eyes gently
- Soft hands and feet
- smooth movements
- hands to face/mouth
- relaxed breathing rate

'I need you to wait and give me more support'

- Splayed hands and / or toes
- Straightening arms/legs
- Skin colour change
- changes to breathing, HR or O2 sats
- hiccups / yawns / sneezes
- becoming floppy

How to give your baby the support they need for caregiving

Babies on the neonatal unit often find the demands of caregiving overwhelming with multiple sensory demands from touch, handling and their environment. They require caregiving that is adjusted to their needs and responsive to the cues they are giving us in order to stay calm and organised in their body.

You can support them by:

- **Being the extra set of hands** to help to calm and support them for procedures and cares - It 'Takes 2 to Care'
- **Gain confidence in carrying out cares** and activities together with your baby. Your Nurse and Neonatal Therapist can show you how in ways that are supportive, calming and nurture your baby's development.
- **Watch and respond to your baby's cues** - if they show 'wait' cues, pause, place still hands on them and wait for them to settle. Tell others what you observe - you are the expert in your baby.
- **A calm environment** really helps - Your baby has to learn what to do with all the sensory input they are receiving. So, keep lighting and voices low, use **your** soft voice to reassure them, use your hands in still, reassuring holds, offer your finger to hold and let them feel your presence.
- **Stay with them** after cares or a procedure, using a still hold and soft voice until they feel settled.
- **Hold them in skin to skin** - this is where they can rest, sleep and calm.

More Information

First Steps for Parents in the Neonatal Unit

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Skin to Skin

