



Tips for Couples with a Baby in the NICU



The experience of having a baby in the neonatal intensive care unit affects everyone differently. While your baby is in the Bryan Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at Children's Hospital of Greenville Health System (GHS), you will find it affects not only who you are as an individual, but also how you relate to others, particularly your partner.

Maintaining a healthy relationship with your partner during this stressful time is very important. Below are several tips to help the two of you keep your relationship supportive and strong while your baby is in the NICU.

Spend time with your baby as a couple. Encourage and praise your partner's tender interactions with your baby. Hold and photograph your baby as a family.

Realize that everyone copes with difficult situations differently. There is no single "right" way to respond. Respect your partner's unique way of handling the NICU experience.

One partner may be more optimistic while the other might focus on fears about the baby's condition or the future. Rather than criticizing each other for these different perspectives, look to each other for balance and praise your partner's strengths.

Be honest and open about your feelings. Encourage your partner to do the same, even if his or her perspective differs from yours. Realize that you cannot change the way someone else feels.

Be clear about what you need and how your partner can help you cope. If you feel strongly about something, explain why. Ask your partner to tell you what you can do to make this time smoother for him or her, too.

Come to an understanding regarding how much information about your baby you will share with others. Partners in the NICU sometimes differ in their comfort levels when it comes to sharing information about their baby.

One partner might want to explain to supportive friends and family what is going on with the child, while the other partner might feel more private and protective of this information. Talk about this early, and make sure both of you are comfortable with the decision.

Use supports. Share your feelings with trusted family members and friends. Speak to other NICU couples to learn different ways of resolving problems and to understand that these difficulties are normal.

If you would like further support, we offer the services of chaplains, social workers and therapists, all of whom are very familiar with such situations and can provide important guidance when things become difficult.

Be patient and understanding. During stressful times, it is hard to find the energy to nurture relationships for which you previously had much more time. You also may not be certain what your own needs are.

Sometimes you can gain comfort from your partner in intimate silence, holding hands or holding each other. Words are not always necessary.

Recognize that this is an unusual time. Remember that having a sick baby can put a great deal of stress on a couple. While your baby's health is your top priority, the extra effort you make to be supportive and available to your partner will go a long way in making this experience a more secure and comfortable one for the whole family.

The information contained is provided for educational and informational purposes only and is not a substitute for medical advice and treatment or consultation with qualified physicians and other healthcare professionals regarding your individual needs. The March of Dimes® is not engaged in rendering medical advice or recommendations. "Tips for Couples with a Baby in the NICU" was developed by the S.C. Chapter March of Dimes in partnership with Children's Hospital of Greenville Health System.