

nicu Family News



The NICU Family News is produced by the Saint Barnabas Medical Center (SBMC) Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) Family Advisory Council (FAC). It is designed to provide you with information we hope you will find useful during and after your family's stay in the NICU.

DID YOU KNOW...

...siblings ages 5 and up can visit the NICU during certain times if you provide proof of their up to date immunizations? "Window visits" can also be arranged for younger siblings that can't enter the NICU. You can get more details about this from your baby's nurses.

Sibling Adjustment in the NICU

Having a baby in the NICU can be a very stressful time for families. Children may have many different feelings during this time and they need your support. Having a baby in the NICU can be made easier for your children when they understand what is happening. Here are some helpful tips from other NICU parents:

- **Have your children make a card or picture to hang in the baby's isolette.** They can also make a tape of a song or story for you to play for the baby to help them bond with the baby.
- **Answer your children's questions.** Use words your children can understand. Do not over explain, but be honest. Offering information may help your child feel more comfortable to ask about the baby. It's also all right to say, "I don't know" when you do not have the answers.
- **Encourage communication.** Allow your children to talk, ask questions, and share their needs. Do not assume a lack of questions means a lack of interest. Children may express their feelings through art or activities. Try to accept their feelings even if their comments are negative.
- **Share your own feelings.** Explain that when you are sad, you cry. You can tell your children you are tired and worried about the baby, but remember to be sensitive to the intensity of the feelings you share.
- **Reassure your children.** Explain that nothing they said, did, or did not do caused the illness or prematurity. Children have a tendency to blame themselves when a difficult situation occurs.
- **Arrange "special time."** Try to set aside special time for your older children so they can look forward to having your undivided attention, even if it's for a short time. There are many activities you can do together including read a book, take a walk, go for ice cream, draw pictures, tell stories, and have "cuddle time".
- **Try to keep as many scheduled routines as possible.** You may need to ask for help and support to do this but it's worth it because routines are very important to children and keeping to a routine can help them feel a sense of control and relieve some anxiety.
- **If your children are in school, tell their teachers about your baby.** Ask them to show added kindness and understanding toward your children while your baby is in the NICU.

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NICU Sibling Support

Interview with Jennifer Barreiro, MSW, LSW, (NICU Social Worker) and Danielle Martello BA, CCLS (Certified Child Life Specialist)

Jennifer and Danielle recently began a **NICU Sibling Group** that meets twice a month in the NICU Family Lounge. Siblings of all ages are welcome. Over the last several months, the Family Advisory Council also developed a coloring/activity book to be used in this group and a Parent Guide to Sibling Adjustment in the NICU. More information about the group follows here but if you have any further questions, please ask your NICU Social Worker.

Q: What do you hope the newly started sibling group will offer NICU families?

A: Jennifer: We designed the group to be educational and to provide as much information as possible about the NICU to make it less scary and easier to understand for the siblings. Also, the group helps facilitate discussions and understanding along the entire family to address questions, concerns and feelings. Working closely with the Child Life Department, we designed a picture book/guide to show real-life images of the NICU and some of the common equipment in the NICU. This allows siblings to see what it looks like in the NICU so that those who can visit will be prepared and those who cannot visit (because they are not old enough or not immunized) understand where the parents and families go to see the baby.

Q: Why do you think the addition of this group is so important for NICU families

A: Danielle: Visiting a new baby brother or sister is a HUGE highlight in any family's life. This is specifically important for older siblings, because they are able to meet and get to know a brand new person that will be a part of their family. However, when the new baby brother or sister is admitted into the NICU, there are often additional questions, fears and concerns. Child Life Specialists have training and experience in helping families with these sibling issues. We act as a member of the family-centered care approach and are there to enhance positive coping in the NICU. The child life specialist helps provide age appropriate preparation for the sibling's visit, using a photo book, a teaching (baby) doll that represents a NICU infant, an activity book, age appropriate language and practical activities. The specialist attempts to clear up any questions or confusion and create a sense of understanding and comfort. Together with the social worker, this group creates an educational, interactive and supportive experience for siblings and parents in the NICU.



Pictured, left, is Danielle during a recent NICU Sibling Group and on the right is Jennifer.

Q: Do you have any other suggestions for parents about talking to their children about the NICU?

A: Jennifer: Try to include your other children in the NICU experience. Talk to them about how the baby is doing. Keep it simple and age appropriate by using words they can understand. It can also help to provide examples whenever possible. There are also some story books that can help with the discussions and educate about the NICU. We have several of them for you to look at or use while you are here, in the NICU family library. Show the sibling pictures and let them ask questions and make observations. Also, parents can utilize art and play to help initiate a conversation about the baby in the NICU. i.e Draw a family picture together, ask the sibling to write a story about the family or write something to the baby and read it together. Another suggestion would be to reassure the sibling that he/she did nothing wrong and in no way are they responsible for the baby in the hospital.

NICU Siblings Say...



Here's what NICU siblings have said about their NICU experiences.

- **Fiona (6 years old):** "I was happy that I had a baby sister but I was sad that she didn't come home. It was hard to be patient but I was happy when I saw her through the window."
- **Jason (7 years old):** "I wished I could go into the unit to see Em and Andy."
- **Sydney (7 years old):** "I liked that one of my sisters came home first and I got to spend time with her. Then the other sister came home and I got to play with them both. I was so happy to finally be a big sister."
- **Christopher (8 years old):** "I remember when I went to visit I had to use a lot of stuff to wash my hands really good at those sinks. I was so happy when a nurse took my little sister out of the isolette and let me touch her and help comb her hair. She was really small and pretty. I couldn't wait to visit her again and I wanted her to come home."
- **Joshua (8 ½ years old):** "It was the best day of my life when my sister came home from the hospital. I finally had a sibling."
- **Catie (9 years old):** "I was excited to have a new sister but I was sad that I couldn't see her for a long time. I was jealous that she got all the attention. I wanted to see what she looked like and was happy when I got to see her and touch her in the hospital."
- **Jack (10 years old):** "I had a lot of mixed feelings when Bridget was born. I felt lonely because she didn't come home for a long time and I was expecting to have a baby. I was scared and worried too. I was happy when Mom told me that Saint Barnabas was the best hospital for taking care of tiny babies. I felt a lot better when we got to see her and meet the doctors at the hospital."



S A V E - T H E - D A T E

**10th Annual Miracle Walk to Benefit the SBMC NICU
Sunday, 10/10/10 in Verona Park, Verona, NJ**

**Complimentary carnival to follow walk
in celebration of 10 years of fundraising!**

To learn more or to sign up:

**Visit www.miraclegwalk.com ■ Email miraclegwalk@sbhcs.com ■ Call 973-322-4259
You can also find MIRACLE WALK on Facebook!**

Important Phone Numbers:

NICU
973-322-5300

NICU Step-down (3100)
973-322-5310

NICU Nurse Manager
973-322-5345

NICU Social Workers
973-322-5503 or 8408

Birth Certificate Office
973-322-5327

Lactation Consultants
973-322-5684

NICU High Risk Infant
Follow-Up Program
973-322-2631

Want to Help the Family Advisory Council?

The FAC is made up of graduate parents dedicated to helping new NICU parents. We meet monthly to discuss ways to do this. We're always looking for recent graduate parents to share their experiences and ideas to make our NICU the best it can be.

We welcome your ideas and participation. Contacts:

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Enjoying Summer With Your Baby

It's wonderful to be able to enjoy the great outdoors in the summer with your baby once you are home. Here are some tips from other parents for having a safe summer with your baby:

- Don't overdress your baby. Dress him in what you'd be comfortable in, you don't want him to get overheated. If you're worried about him getting cool, carry a blanket with you.
- It is usually not recommended you use sunscreen on your baby until about 6 months of age, so check with your pediatrician before that first sunny day outside.
- You may want to buy a shade for the stroller to protect baby from the sun. The shades that come on the strollers don't usually offer enough coverage. A wide-brimmed hat can also help keep the sun off baby's head and face.
- Most pediatricians suggest you do NOT use insect repellent until your baby is 6 months old but check with them to be sure.
- You can buy a bug net for over the stroller and pack and play. You may also want to consider an inexpensive pedestal rotating fan for some air on the hot humid days and let it blow near (but not directly on) baby's seat / stroller. This can help keep baby cool and keep the bugs away at the same time!
- Make sure baby's room is cool enough at night but don't let the air conditioner or fan blow directly on the baby.
- It's very important for mom and baby to be drinking enough fluids to stay hydrated. Try to keep a bottle of water with you at all times.
- If you are carrying breast milk or formula in a cooler, don't forget to put an ice pack in with it so it doesn't spoil.
- Try to keep your baby out of direct sunlight especially if he or she is on medications which direct you to be careful about direct sunlight.
- During the height of the summer, try to avoid being outside with your baby between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. when the sun / temperature is hottest.

