



# **From the heart**

Parenting your baby in the NICU

# Your baby knows you are here, and everything you do matters.

The Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) can feel scary and overwhelming. Even though it is stressful, the time you can spend with your baby will help them feel safe, loved, and connected to you. Your presence truly makes a difference.

This booklet shares a few ways you can parent your baby while they are in the NICU.

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# I am yours



**I love it when you are with me.**

Getting to know each other will take time, especially while we are in the stressful NICU environment.



There may be times when you may not know what I need, whether I am happy, tired, or overstimulated. This booklet will help you understand me better – how I communicate with you, and how you can respond to me.

# I am communicating with you



Even before I can talk, I am communicating with you through my facial expressions, body movements, and sounds. These are all ways I may show you how I am feeling in the moment.



When you are here with me, there are times you can just sit quietly and...

- Watch my movements and facial expressions.
- Listen to the sounds I might make.
- Notice how I respond when you talk to me.

If sometimes my movements or sounds worry you or you feel unsure, please speak to my care team. We are all learning together.

# I know you are here with me

When you are here and watching me, I can feel your presence. Being close strengthens our connection.

Spending time with me will help you recognize my movements and what they mean.

When I am feeling happy and comfortable, you may notice that...

- I am lying in a flexed position.
- My hands are together near my mouth.
- I can suck on my finger/hand.
- I can brace my feet.





When I am tired, uncomfortable, unsettled, irritable, or overstimulated, I may..

- Squirm, make jerky movements, or arch my back.
- Hold my arms and legs stiffly.
- Stretch my arms and fingers out (splayed fingers).
- Cry or whimper.
- Look worried by frowning or grimacing.
- Yawn, hiccup, or sneeze.
- Stick out my tongue.
- Change how I am breathing.



# Be my voice



As we get to know each other, you will notice what helps me feel calm, what makes me comfortable, and when I need a break.



You can be my voice by sharing what I like with the NICU team.

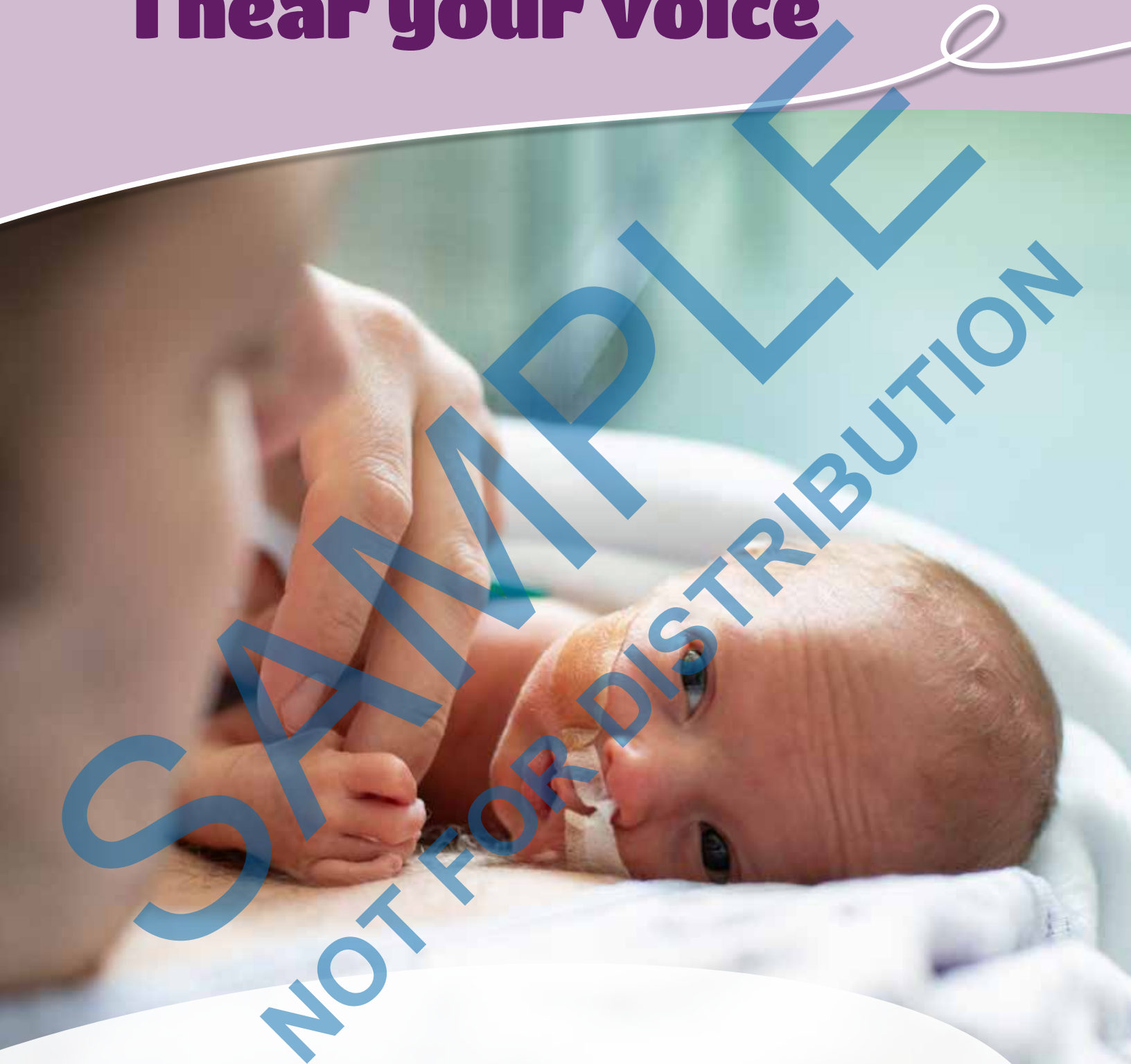
This may include:

- Holding me skin-to-skin, sometimes called Kangaroo Care.
- Helping me keep my arms and legs tucked in close to my body.
- Holding your finger.
- Sucking on something, such as my finger/hand or a pacifier.
- Hearing your soft, soothing voice.

As you continue to learn more about me, please share what you notice with my care team so they can help care for me too.



# I hear your voice



I have been hearing your voice for months before I was born.  
Hearing your voice comforts me and strengthens our connection.

When you are here, you can...

- Sing or talk to me softly; even with my eyes closed, I can hear you.
- Read books, poems, or rhymes to me.
- Describe what is happening around me and what I am experiencing so I know what to expect.



# I love your touch

Any time you are here with me, your gentle but firm touch helps me feel safe.

Sometimes I will have tests or treatments that can be stressful or uncomfortable – like an ultrasound, heel prick, blood test, or eye exam. Your touch will help to ease my stress and pain.





These are some ways you can help me feel comforted:

- Hold me close or do skin-to-skin contact (Kangaroo Care).
- Let me hold your finger.
- Gently but firmly touch my hands, feet, or body.
- Give me a hand hug if I am in my incubator, isolette, or crib.
- Breastfeed me or let me suck on my finger/hand.

When you are not here, you can....

- Leave something with me that has your smell on it, like a small scent cloth or blanket.

# You are my champion

You mean the world to me. Your love helps me every day. Feeling your touch and hearing your voice helps me feel loved and part of our family.



Even when the situation feels difficult, your presence comforts me. You are an important part of my journey in the NICU.

**Thank you for being my champion.**

# What else can I do, in the NICU?



## Learn More

Here are some ways to help you get involved and become an active part of your baby's/babies' care team:

- Talk to your baby's healthcare team about ways to spend time with and care for your baby.
- Ask questions to learn more about your baby's growth and development and how you can support them.
- Ask for resources, handouts, and websites.
- Ask your healthcare team for clarification or request a family meeting/update if you do not understand something or want more information about your baby's care.





## Take Part/Be Present

When you can be with your baby, every moment counts.

- Participate as much as possible in your baby's care.
- Be actively involved in creating the care plan for your baby.

Learn how to feel comfortable when...

- Changing your baby's diaper.
- Taking your baby's temperature.
- Doing your baby's mouth care.
- Positioning your baby comfortably in the incubator, isolette, or crib.
- Holding your baby skin-to-skin (Kangaroo Care) as much as possible.



## Remember, it is also important to look after yourself.

It is normal to have many feelings, from being joyful to feeling overwhelmed, guilty, frustrated, confused, angry, scared and tired. You are not alone. It is okay to ask for support.



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Infant and Early Mental  
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