

# Things Parents Can Do With Their Baby in the NICU

## When you are with your baby you can:

### Provide multisensory stimulation:

#### Visual

- Get up close to your baby and look at them
- Observe your baby's behavior and learn to read their cues
- Hold eye contact while feeding, holding, and massaging

#### Voice

- Talk, hum, and sing to your baby as much as you can

#### Touch

- Skin-to-skin holding (kangaroo care)
- Provide Containing Touch
- You can provide touch simply to show love
- Ask your nurse if you can help with caregiving tasks, including:
  - taking the temperature
  - changing the diaper
  - swaddling
  - positioning
  - applying Aquafor® (infant massage)
  - breast and bottle feeding

#### Motion

- Wrap your baby up in a blanket and gently rock baby back and forth
- Hold your baby swaddled in your arms or lap

## In between visits you can:

#### Document

- Write in your Baby Diary

#### Connect

- Leave something with your smell on it for your baby
- Leave a picture of you for your baby
- Carry a picture of your baby

#### Visualize

- Imagine how your milk is nourishing your baby

#### Share

- Share observations with the nurses and doctors on anything about your baby that concerns you

#### Communicate

- Ask questions about:
  - your baby's medical status
  - change in your baby
  - things you can do to care for your baby
  - things you will soon be able to do with your baby

These are all things that only you can do as your baby's mom.

Multisensory stimulation

**3 times a day** for **10 minutes**

can help promote faster growth and development.

# Reading Your Baby's Cues

Even though your baby cannot talk yet, and maybe cannot cry yet, your baby still has ways of communicating with you. Learning to read your baby's cues can help you understand your baby and their needs.

## Movement

### When Stressed

- Frantic movements
- Rigid
- Leg or arm flails
- Fingers splayed
- Facial frown
- Tongue out
- Arching

### When Calm

- Smooth movements
- Puts hand to mouth
- Puckering lips looking for food
- Sucking
- Hand/finger hold
- Grasping
- Flexed

## Interaction

### When Stressed

- Looking away
- Staring
- Eyes floating
- Whimpering, grimacing
- Fussy, overly alert
- Frantic cry
- Abrupt state changes

### When Calm

- Paying attention to stimulus
- Relaxed face
- Puckered lips
- Cooing, smiling
- Easy to sleep/wake
- Period of quiet-alert
- Ability to self-console
- Gradual state changes

## Vital Signs

### When Stressed

- Slow or fast, gasping, short of breath
- Rapid heart rate
- Pale, mottled, dusky, or flushed

### When Calm

- Calm, relaxed breathing
- Normal heart rate
- Pink Skin

▶ **Breathing:**

▶ **Heart:**

▶ **Skin Color:**

# Sleep and Awake States

One of the best ways you can help your baby is to know good times to **interact** and good times to **let your baby rest**.

State	Description	What Parent Can Do
DEEP SLEEP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quietly sleeping with few movements</li> <li>• Breathing is usually regular</li> <li>• Baby is resting and growing the most</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ At times, leave baby in bed with no extra stimulation</li> <li>✓ Provide <i>Containing Touch</i></li> <li>✓ Hold Skin-to-Skin (<i>Kangaroo Care</i>) [see Handout 3]</li> </ul>
LIGHT SLEEP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eyelids may flutter or open briefly</li> <li>• Breathing is often irregular</li> <li>• May move face and body</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ At times, leaving baby with no extra stimulation will help them sleep</li> <li>✓ Provide <i>Containing Touch</i></li> <li>✓ Hold Skin-to-Skin</li> <li>✓ Reposition if appears uncomfortable</li> </ul>
DROWSY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This stage occurs right before baby falls asleep or wakes up</li> <li>• Eyes may open and close</li> <li>• Eyes may be partially open and look tired and unfocused</li> <li>• Whole body looks tired</li> <li>• Baby may either fall asleep or become fussy with too much stimulation (talking or movement)</li> </ul>	<p><b>If baby is just waking up:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Tent baby's eyes, block light to encourage eye-opening</li> <li>✓ Provide <i>Containing Touch</i></li> <li>✓ Talk quietly to baby</li> <li>✓ If baby needs to wake for feeding: unwrap, gently move arms/legs and gently stroke.</li> </ul> <p><b>If baby needs help falling asleep:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Reduce amount of stimulation (less talking, less touching/movement)</li> <li>✓ Swaddle your baby</li> <li>✓ Hold Skin-to-Skin</li> </ul>

## State

## Description

## What Parent Can Do

### CALM ALERT

- Eyes are open for at least 15 seconds
  - Breathing is usually regular
  - Baby is resting and growing the most
- ✓ This is the BEST time to interact with your baby
  - ✓ This is the time for face-to-face interaction: talking, reading, singing softly to baby
  - ✓ Observe if baby can focus on your face or on another object positioned 8-12 inches from baby's face
  - ✓ If baby focuses on your face, *slowly* move your face to the side while talking to see if baby will follow with their eyes
  - ✓ Allow baby to look away if their eyes wander or focus on something else

### ACTIVE ALERT

- Often occurs between Calm Alert and becoming Fussy/ Crying
  - Baby's body is active and responsive
  - Baby may be getting hungry
- ✓ Try similar activities as for Calm Alert (see above) but for shorter duration
  - ✓ Offer pacifier
  - ✓ Provide containment if baby is flailing their arms or looks uncomfortable

### FUSSING/CRYING

- While crying, baby's skin color may change
  - Baby may thrust arms and legs forward or may "flail" arms
  - Baby may grunt or appear uncomfortable
- ✓ Attempt to identify sources of discomfort (wet diaper, hunger)
  - ✓ Try holding, offering pacifier, talking softly, and possibly rocking baby gently in your arms
  - ✓ Try repositioning or containment