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Modalities of Peer-to-Peer and Family Support in the NICU

Prepared by Peer Support Team of the Workgroup on Psychosocial Support of NICU Parents

(convened by the National Perinatal Association)

Individual Peer-to-Peer Support

Benefits	Limitations
A parent can best understand what another parent is going through.	May be difficult to make a good match.
Provides acceptance and respect without judgment.	Buddy parent may not have specific experience of what parent is going through.
Validates parents' emotions and normalizes their situation.	Communication styles, parenting styles, outlook on life may differ between matches.
Provides someone to talk to not affiliated with the medical team; easier to understand parents' explanations.	May need to change match.
Provides continuity of care through NICU experience; decreases length of stay.	Not much research on fathers.
May serve as substitute for family and friends.	

Support by Telephone

Benefits	Limitations
Flexible, spontaneous, available around the clock.	Parents may want their support to come to them.
Private, non-stigmatising.	Parents may need financial help with calls.
Easily accessible to all (SES, geography, ethnicity).	Participants may lose phone numbers.
Parents don't need child care.	Buddy parent may be negligent in following through.
Parents may not have time to connect with their friends and family.	Parents may be too busy to utilize.
Support available when parents need it gives a feeling of dependability.	Parents may not find their match to be helpful.

Parent Support Groups

Benefits	Limitations
Both information and support are provided.	New parents may not want to hear old parents' stories.
Parents may get comfort from talking with experienced parents.	Group may actually increase parents' stress.
Parents get coaching on how to collaborate with healthcare team.	If professionals run groups, they need to give up their role as experts.
Helps parents learn how to interact with their baby and gain confidence.	Parents may not feel comfortable sharing in front of strangers.
Reduces parental isolation.	May be difficult to maintain attendance.
Helps parents get insight into feelings.	Group may dissolve if leader moves on.

Internet Support Groups

Benefits	Limitations
Can be especially helpful after NICU discharge.	Some posts may be harmful or destructive.
Parents can access anytime, anywhere. Especially beneficial to parents in rural areas and to young, single parents.	Reduced social presence may lead to emotionally charged or negative interactions.
May reduce use of healthcare services.	Information may be misleading or unreliable.
Parents don't have to participate; they can read posts anonymously.	May not have professional oversight to ensure discussions are medically sound.
Reduces influence of gender, age and social class that can inhibit face-to-face communication.	
Collective knowledge of group is available to all.	

SLH

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