



[www.support4NICUParents.org](http://www.support4NICUParents.org)

### **Preparing Parents for Life After the NICU**

- 1- Take any classes your NICU has to offer. These may include classes on baby care, medication administration, CPR, and others. In some NICUs, these topics may be taught to you on an individual basis. Even if you have other children, consider taking these classes, as the needs of premature babies are different from the needs of healthy, term babies. If your baby will require the use of equipment at home, make sure both you and your spouse or significant other, as well as other trusted relatives or friends, receive instruction on the use of the equipment.
- 2- Spend the night rooming in at the hospital if this is offered. This will give you a chance to take care of your baby while the nurses are still available, and is especially valuable as a “dry run” if your baby is going home with any kind of equipment such as oxygen, apnea monitor, feeding tube, etc. It should help ease your fears about having all the responsibility of caring for your baby on your own shoulders and give you confidence that you can handle it. Some NICUs will even let parents stay for several nights in a row if it is needed to allow parents to feel comfortable with their new responsibilities.
- 3- Accept home services if they are available. These could include home nursing or respite care if your child is technology-dependent, and all states offer programs that provide developmental evaluation and treatment for your child for free. In these programs, a trained professional typically comes to your home to see how your baby is doing at meeting his or her developmental milestones, and offers suggestions for what you can do to enhance your baby’s development.
- 4- Acknowledge to yourself that coping with the “fall-out” from giving birth to a preemie is going to be a life-long process.
- 5- Be prepared for insensitive comments from others. Strategize for ways to deal with them.
- 6- Be proactive about your mental health:
  - a. Learn about PTSD and try to avoid triggers.
  - b. Be vigilant about postpartum depression and watchful for OCD.

- 7- Anticipate and prepare for social isolation during the winter cold virus (RSV) season. The biggest risk for reshospitalization of your baby comes if he or she acquires an infection, even something as simple as a cold. Unfortunately, you have to be careful about who comes to visit you and baby (don't allow anyone with a cold or fever to visit), and you have to be sensible about hand hygiene at home too. Avoid taking baby into crowds (grocery store, church, parties) during the winter flu season.
- 8- Be mentally prepared for the possibility of rehospitization. The rate of rehospitization is higher in preemies than in healthy term babies.
- 9- Don't lower your expectations for your child or limit their opportunities unnecessarily. You may have been told that your baby won't be able to do certain things, but don't assume that everything you have been told is correct.
- 10- Schedule some time away from your child and some time for yourself. Find a trusted friend, relative, or other caregiver with whom you can leave your baby for a short while to take a "mental health break" for yourself, and/or take a date night with your spouse or significant other.

SLH, 2/17/16