

# Visiting Your Baby in the NICU

Visitation from parents and other appropriate family members is one of the best ways to help bond with a baby in the NICU.

Danyel Harber makes visiting baby Izzy part of her daily routine. She was born at 25 weeks and is getting stronger every day.

*“The first thing I do in the morning is I come in and put my stuff down and just immediately start talking to her. I do believe that she can hear me. I believe she knows who I am and knows that whether I’m here or not.”*

Anyone who enters the NICU must do a thorough hand washing and sanitizing before they are allowed to be near the baby. The NICU also has strict guidelines about who can visit – especially when it comes to siblings.

*“We screen siblings to make sure they don’t have any cold symptoms or any fevers which could be contagious.”*

For family members who can’t visit a baby personally, NICU staff will still try to provide ways to interact with baby.

*“We’d make sure the family sees the baby; we have pictures, we’ve used computers, whatever it takes to get the family and the baby to interact and become a family.”*

Or you can always get creative in parenting.

*“My husband laughs at me because I can’t dress her up at this point, so I buy blankets and I dress her bed up and I put bows on her. I just do those kinds of things and I play music for her. Anything that you can do for her. Even just standing over her bed talking to her.”*

If a baby is stable enough, doctors may even encourage something called “Kangaroo Care,” where mothers and fathers will hold a baby under their clothes for skin-to-skin contact to warm and sooth the infant.

*“Skin to skin contact is very positive. The babies are able to maintain their temperature and often they relax and then can feel the heat of the mother, the skin of the mother, and the scent of the mother. All those things are very important.”*

One other way to help babies in the NICU is for mothers to breast feed. Hospitals often supply mothers with the necessary containers and labeling information for them to pump milk at home to bring to the NICU.

*“Breast milk is the best source of nutrition for premature babies and newborns because it provides the nutritional elements for adequate growth and development. Furthermore, breast milk contains antibodies and some other elements that help babies to fight infection.”*

*“I know that it’s very good for her, that all the antibodies and the good bacteria and you know they talk about even just the first few days what your breast milk can provide for your baby and if I’m able to do it, I’m willing to, if my milk comes in then I’m going to.”*

*“If the baby’s intestines seem ready for food but the baby is not coordinated, we would put in a little feeding tube, it looks like a piece of spaghetti with a hollow core, it’s very soft very flexible. We’ll put it either in the baby’s mouth or the baby’s nose.”*

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Each day in the NICU gets babies closer to the time when they can go home with their families. The Harbor family is anxiously awaiting the introduction of Izzie to her older siblings Noah and Olivia.

*“You have to take it one day at a time. You have to learn that things are going to happen that are out of your control, but you have to try and find the best in everything. And you just, you have faith, you have hope, you pray and you’re going to take your baby home.”*