What to Expect
When You Visit Your Sibling
in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit
A note for parents and caregivers:

This book is for children of all ages. It explains a common experience when visiting a baby in Seattle Children’s Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU).

Because every family’s NICU experience is different, some parts of this book may not apply to your child. Some children can cope with a lot of information. Others may become anxious with too much information. You know your child best: choose which sections to share.

What you can do

We encourage you to be as much a part of your child’s hospital experience as possible. Siblings are welcome to visit as often as they would like during hospital visiting hours. If your child is in isolation or their sibling is ill, please talk with your nurse before visiting. Caregivers are welcome and encouraged to be at the bedside 24 hours each day.

For questions or support for your child, or to schedule a consult with a Child Life specialist (includes medical play, coping strategies and/or a tour), please contact:

Seattle Children’s ICU Child Life Specialists
206-987-0450
Many babies come to the hospital and need to stay in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). Some babies’ stays are planned. Other babies must come to the hospital suddenly.

You can visit your brother or sister in the NICU (sounds like NIK-yoo). Your visit is very important to them. This book will help answer questions that you may have about their stay.
Here are a few areas you might see when you arrive at the hospital.

You will need to stay with your parent or another adult when you visit. Adults and kids 12 and older will get a badge to wear while they visit the hospital.
Before you see your brother or sister, you will first meet the unit coordinator. The unit coordinator is someone who welcomes families to the NICU and helps answer their questions.

The NICU can be a busy place. The unit coordinator will let you know when you can visit your brother or sister.
Your brother or sister will have many people taking care of them while in the hospital. Their care team may include doctors, nurses and other specialists.

Here is a place in the NICU where you may see people working.

What do you think these people do?
Inside the room is a bed for your brother or sister. There is also equipment that helps take care of them.

Which kind of bed do you think your brother or sister is in?
These are some of the machines you might see in the room. You might hear them beep.

The monitor shows your brother or sister’s heart rate. Your heart rate is how fast your heart is beating. The monitor can also tell how well your brother or sister is breathing.

A pulse oximeter [ahk-SIM-uh-ter], or pulse ox, looks like a Band-Aid with a little red light. It wraps around your brother or sister’s finger or toe to measure how much oxygen is in their blood.
This pole holds small machines that give medicine and liquids to your brother or sister. The medicine goes to your brother or sister’s body through a small tube called an IV or PICC line.

The boom is attached to the ceiling. The nurse can move it around and plug things into it like a CD player or medical equipment.

You might hear these machines beep. The beeps remind the nurse to check the machine.
Before you visit your brother or sister, you will need to wash your hands. You may be able to touch them, talk to them or hold their hand. They like to know you are with them.

Some kids like to bring something for their brother or sister when they visit. This could be a picture that you made, a stuffed animal, or even a favorite book or toy from home.

What will you say to your brother or sister? What will you bring them?
After visiting your brother or sister, you might get to visit the hospital’s playroom. You can find lots of fun things in the Playroom or Teen Zone, including:

- Games
- Toys
- Crafts
- Puzzles
- Music
- Art activities

In the playroom you can make something for your brother or sister’s room. What do you want to do in the playroom?
Some kids like to talk about how they are feeling during their visit. You can point to the faces to tell your parent or caregiver about your feelings.

Very happy
Happy
OK
Nervous
Sad or scared
Very sad or scared

Draw a picture of how you feel today
We hope this has helped you understand what to expect when you visit your brother or sister in the NICU. Do you have any questions? Please ask!
My Visit Plan

You can use this plan to prepare for your visit. Fill it out and bring it with you.

My name is: _____________________________. I am _______ years old.

Some special things to know about me:
________________________________________
________________________________________

When I visit my brother or sister I would like to:
________________________________________
________________________________________

When I am sad or scared, this helps me feel better:
________________________________________
________________________________________

Something that will help me during my visit:
________________________________________
________________________________________
Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your child’s nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line, 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.

Seattle Children’s offers interpreter services for Deaf, hard of hearing or non-English speaking patients, family members and legal representatives free of charge. Seattle Children’s will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Call the Family Resource Center at 206-987-2201.

This handbook has been reviewed by clinical staff at Seattle Children’s. However, your child’s needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child’s healthcare provider.

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