



Grandparents and the Neonatal Unit

Your precious grandchild has arrived and requires special care in a neonatal unit. Your feelings maybe mixed with worry for the health of your grandchild as well as concern for your daughter or son and how they may cope with the babies stay in hospital.

Here are some practical tips for grandparents to help their children through their babies stay in hospital:

- **Acknowledge the baby's birth.** For example: send flowers to the mother, a photo album, baby book, diary or calendar to record important events.
- Find out exactly whom to **notify about the baby's birth** and what information the baby's parent(s) want others to know.
- **Only do what your child feels happy with.** Sometimes what you think maybe helpful may not be at this time.
- **Take a back seat role**, if that is what the babies parents want. This maybe just while they adjust to their own emotions.
- **Offer to help.** Drive the mother to and from the hospital, to sit with her, supply lunch.
- **Offer to mind their other children**, spend extra time interacting with them, and help them to feel as important as the baby.



- **Offer to visit** or read a book to your grandchild when the parents cannot be there.
- **Find something about the baby to complement at each visit.** For example, hair colour, eyes, willingness to fight, how they seem to know when their parent comes near and speaks.



“As a parent it is natural for you to want to take your child’s fears, pain and anxiety away, but it is your ongoing love and support that will make the most difference.”

- **Do not make critical comments** about the ways your grandchild is being cared for in hospital. The staff are the experts and babies in a neonatal unit need to be handled and parented in specific, and sometimes different ways to full-term babies.
- **Be mindful of the fragile state**, listen to their fears and worries. This can be sometimes all they need.
- **Be patient and supportive.** Every day for a baby in the neonatal unit may be different.
- **Try to alleviate guilt.** It’s natural for a mother of a sick baby to feel guilty or responsible for the condition and problems of her baby. In most cases, it is not the mother’s fault and she shouldn’t blame herself. She needs to hear this over and over again.
- **Build your child up** by telling them what a good job they’re doing, how you admire their strength and dedication and their parenting skills. Never undermine their efforts, even if you think they need ‘helpful’ suggestions.
- Understand that no matter how altered your child may seem, **they will come through this.** This process will be much easier with your support.
- **Do not expect praise**, thanks or that your child will necessarily notice all of your efforts. Hopefully, this will come to you over time, your child is likely to be in shock.
- **Recognise that you too may need support** and seek help if needed. Your child will not have the emotional space to look after you. This is the time for you to be strong for your child.
- For Grandparents who live far away, interstate or overseas, **make regular contact** through email, skype and phone calls and stay positive and strong for everyone involved.
- **Be mindful to distance yourself from the parents if you are unwell with a cough or cold** and remember to update your whooping cough vaccine before visiting the baby.

If you or your child would like to speak to one of our peer support volunteers, please call: 1300 697 736.

More information can be found at: www.lifeslittletreasures.org.au