



# Bringing Home Your Preterm Infant

Most preterm infants grow to become healthy, active children. It is important, however, that premature babies are provided extra time and nurturing when adjusting to their new worlds. Preterm infants need a low stress, slow paced, comfortable environment so they can conserve energy for growth and development. Premies need caregivers to remove distractions and stress from their environments so they do not have to use extra energy to block it out.

There are many things parents can do to help their premature child successfully transition to the home environment.

## **Look For Cues From Your Baby:**

### **Signs your baby is ready to interact:**

- Facial expressions are relaxed
- Arms and legs are relaxed
- Looks at your face and listens to your voice
- Tolerates touch
- Smiles and coos
- Makes “O” shape with mouth
- Sticks out tongue
- Clasps hand
- Brings hands to face or mouth

### **Signs your baby is feeling stressed:**

- Avoids looking at you
- Yawns
- Arches his/her back
- Squirms
- Startles
- Hiccups
- Hand held with open fingers
- Frowns, grimaces
- Blocks face with hands

## **Activities you can do with your child when he/she is ready to interact:**

- Mother/infant skin-to-skin contact may improve an infant’s ability to self-soothe and regulate arousal.
- Whole body infant massage may relieve discomfort from gas, aid in or improve digestion, feeding, reduce stress hormones and enhance immune system functioning and the development of the nervous system. Call 603-580-6668 for infant massage class information.
- Talk and sing to your child. Nursery rhymes may improve language skills. The slow, gentle rhythmic sounds of lullabies are soothing to both infants and parents.
- Allow your child to be placed in different positions (if cleared by your child’s physician). Changing positions may improve breathing, decrease flat spots on the head, and allow for movement in less challenging positions.



**When your baby is stressed:**

- Take time out from what you are doing and hold your baby, quietly bringing his/her arms and legs close to your body. Be careful not to over-stimulate by cradling and rocking.
- Talk quietly to your baby. Sometimes your face provides the right amount of stimulation.
- Make a nest for your baby. Surround him/her with soft rolls or material. Bring his/her hand to his/her mouth-sucking is a soothing activity for babies and helps them conserve energy for feeding and interacting.

**Arrange the environment to minimize environmental distraction:**

- Keep room lights dim.
- Minimize noise levels and avoid background noise.
- Avoid conversations from across the room.
- Offer music to transition to sleep. Choose a soft song and play it for five minutes or until your child falls asleep. Turn off the music once your child is sleeping. Sound machines on low can also be used during sleeping.
- Keep your baby swaddled. Create physical boundaries that will give your baby a sense of security.
- When transitioning to a bath keep your baby swaddled while lowering into the bath and unwrap your child once he/she is put into the water. This minimizes temperature changes during the transition.
- Before picking your child up from his/her crib or changing table, lower your body to meet the child rather than lifting the child to you. This will provide a feeling of closeness.
- Limit picture taking, as the bright flash is not good for preemies' immature vision.

It is very important to protect your child's sleep. Premature infants require more sleep than a full term infant. Sleep is vital for brain growth and development.

**References:**

Rosemarie Bigsby, ScD, BCP, OTR/L, FAOTA

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