

The Newborn Cuddling Program

The Newborn Cuddling Program at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center is part of the NICU C.A.R.E.S. for Families initiatives which is designed to make the NICU journey a little easier for families in a time of crisis.

About

NICU C.A.R.E.S. for Families

NICU C.A.R.E.S. for Families is a multi-faceted program designed to provide Compassion, Advocacy, Respect, Empathy and Support for NICU families before, during and after their baby's hospitalization. The program includes antepartum support for moms on bedrest, peer and social support for families during the NICU journey and beyond.

Activities such as parent-to-parent mentoring, coffee hours, scrapbooking workshops, a Newborn Cuddling Program, NICU Reunions, special photo days, workshop series and other events are designed to make the NICU Journey a little easier to navigate during a time of great stress for many families.

Quotes

from Families About Newborn Cuddling Program

"We felt an immediate sense of relief when we learned about the cuddling program. Our daughter's NICU stay lasted 2 months longer than her twin brother's and as she got older it became extremely important for her to have more personal interactions and hugs than we alone could give her. Knowing that the cuddlers were coming in to do nothing but spend time with her alleviated some of our stress and made it easier for us to leave her at night. It was also crucial for her development and we are forever thankful for the wonderful cuddlers."

— *Lauren Fahey*

"The cuddling program meant so much to us. It was hard to not be able to be at the hospital all the time. It made it a lot easier when I knew someone was holding her when I couldn't."

— *Amy Nolette*

"Someone else cuddling, the thought was questionable at first. But what a wonderful feeling that some caring, loving, person could be there to talk or sing when you can't."

— *Lori Beckwith, parent of former 26 weeker*



Beth Israel Deaconess
Medical Center



HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL
TEACHING HOSPITAL



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What is the Newborn Cuddling Program?

Volunteer Cuddlers are available to hold and rock babies at times when parents are unable to be in the hospital. The Newborn Cuddling Program at BIDMC is a volunteer-based service for eligible babies in the NICU and Newborn Nurseries.

What does a Cuddler do?

Depending on the developmental needs of your baby, Cuddlers can rock, sing, and/or read to your baby. They are specially-trained to know how much – or little – stimulation (including touch, motion and sound) your baby can tolerate. Cuddlers do not feed, dress, change diapers or walk around with your baby, or perform any clinical tasks.

What are the benefits of Cuddling?

As much as parents would like to be, they cannot always be in the hospital. Some must work, some live far away, or may have other children to care for. Research shows that:

- Human touch can enhance preemies' growth, improve their health and help them develop trusting relationships later in life.
- Cuddling frequently helps infants gain weight and grow faster.
- Preemies that are held tend to use less energy crying so that they can use it solely to grow.

Is my baby eligible for Cuddling?

Babies eligible for cuddling are typically 34 weeks or older, and “Level 2” patients, which means that they no longer require ventilator support (respirator or C-PAP) and are primarily in the “feeder-grower” stage. Ask your baby’s nurse if you are not sure.

Who Supervises the Cuddlers?

All of our volunteer Cuddlers are supervised by the NICU nursing staff. Cuddlers report to the Resource Nurse upon their arrival and are assigned eligible babies to cuddle. The Cuddlers work with the nursing staff to transfer babies to and from their cribs.

Are the Cuddlers screened?

Yes ... all of our Cuddlers must pass regular health screenings, background checks and undergo training specific to the needs of premature infants, including infection control, NICU safety procedures and developmental care. Cuddlers are under a strict illness policy and will not hold your baby if they are sick or have been exposed to someone who is.

When are Cuddlers available?

As volunteers, Cuddlers have semi-regular hours in the hospital. We try to work with the staff and the family to provide Cuddling when the baby most needs it, such as when parents are not available or just after a care-time to help

settle them back down to sleep. Depending on their availability, Cuddlers come in at different times and different days.

How do I sign my baby up for Cuddling?

Once your baby reaches a certain age (typically 34 weeks or older) and other developmental and clinical milestones, and his or her care team feels your baby is ready for Cuddling, he or she will be eligible for the Cuddling Program. The Cuddling Program is a standard practice of care for ALL babies in the NICU, and you will be informed about the program and given this brochure. You may opt-out of the program at any time by letting your baby’s nurse know that you’d prefer that your baby not be enrolled.

Does my baby have to be Cuddled?

No. You can opt out of the Cuddling Program at any time. Just let your baby’s nurse know if you would prefer not to participate in the program.

If you have any further questions, please ask your baby’s nurse, or contact:

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