

# Supporting siblings while your baby is in the NICU

Prepare your child as soon as you know you are a preemie parent.

## What you need to know to help your child make sense of this experience.



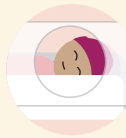
### Focus on routine, connection, and involvement

Help your child feel safe and supported by keeping their routines, spending one-on-one time with them, listening to them, and offering activities that make them feel included. This could be making artwork for the baby. Be sure to talk to your child about the baby, explain as much as you can, and encourage them to share their feelings so they do not feel left out and alone.

Here are some more useful tips:



Explain who will care for them when you go to the NICU



Prepare your child before they see the baby



Help them express feelings through art, stories, or activities



Share a photo or video of the baby with your child



Explain the equipment and noises in the NICU



Tell your child's teachers/caregivers your baby is in NICU

### Talking with your child

Use honest answers that suit your child's age. Your gentle voice and simple explanations help your child understand without causing too much worry. You may have to repeat information often. Help them share their feelings, and share your own feelings too - children often feel your emotions, even if you don't tell them. To start, you could say, "Your baby sister was born early and needs special help in the hospital." Ask if the NICU has someone who can guide you in how to talk to your child.

### Understanding what siblings may experience

Your child's age, personality, and family support affect how they respond. Changes in behaviour are normal, and even expected. You may notice more clinginess, tantrums, crying and changes in sleep or eating. These behaviours are usually temporary. Ask for support if this continues and you are worried.



#### Plan ahead before you bring siblings to the NICU

Ask your baby's nurse about the NICU guidelines that keep everyone safe:

- Sibling age rules
- Health questionnaire
- Proper handwashing
- Items allowed in NICU
- In-room guidelines for children
- Bringing another adult to help you
- NICU resources for siblings
- Activities you can bring for your child



Visit us online for more information on Siblings of Premies, plus other useful resources and programs focused on premature babies and their families.

**CPBF**  Canadian Premature Babies Foundation  
[canadianpreemies.org](https://canadianpreemies.org)