

**That first moment you see your new baby is overwhelming. Some people bond immediately with their new bundle. However, it's not always the case and it's quite normal for things to take a bit of extra time.**

Bonding is often a process and it can sometimes be difficult for parents to feel comfortable with their baby, especially if born early, unwell or with complications. This is not the journey you had expected, there are alarms that sound in an unfamiliar world and you feel like every time you touch your baby you don't quite know how they are going to react. In many cases parents can't touch or hold their neonatal baby for days or weeks.

Whilst the beeping and the extra machinery can seem overwhelming and scary, try and let the nurses and doctors worry about this, which will leave you to spend time getting to know your baby. You can learn to tell when they're happy or uncomfortable. Your baby 'knows' you – your voice and your smell and your presence will give your baby a sense of familiarity and comfort. This is a great starting point for bonding.



**Here are some ideas to help you and your baby bond while in the neonatal unit. Don't forget Dad's, you can do this too!**

## Your touch

Your baby looks so fragile and it's understandable to feel nervous about holding or touching them. However, a parent's touch can be exactly what they need right now and can really help build confidence. It can let your baby enjoy and experience your touch, even when they're not ready to be held. Talk to your baby's doctor or nurse and they can show you the best way to touch your baby. It usually involves holding your baby's hand, or cradling their hands or feet with still, resting hands as opposed to stroking, there by eliminating over stimulation.

## Kangaroo Cuddles

If your baby is well enough, you can enjoy a very special kangaroo cuddle. This is when your baby is taken out of their incubator or cot and placed on the parent's chest, usually under clothes so the baby gets skin-to-skin contact and can hear your heartbeat. The closeness provides a warm and soothing environment and can help you feel closer to your baby. Studies indicate that kangaroo cuddles may result in physical

benefits, fewer breathing problems, less energy-wasting fidgeting, faster weight gain and a more constant body temperature.

Many babies improve when they're being held by their parents. They've been listening to these voices in the womb and even the smallest babies recognise their families. Ask your nurse if your baby is ready for a kangaroo cuddle yet. They can help plan a good time to try it and you can lie back, relax and enjoy. Read more about Kangaroo cuddles [here](#)

## Sharing your smell

Holding your baby is a fantastic way to help your baby recognise your smell. If you can't do that yet, you could put something that smells of you in your baby's incubator. Just be sure to check that it's OK with your baby's doctor first. Avoid using perfume or scented deodorant because these can interfere with your baby getting to know your smell.

## Basic cares

Your baby's care team will show you how to help care for your baby. By doing this, you become a part of your baby's life and they'll learn to recognise you. You'll also learn how to handle your baby in the ways they like best. This will include some of the following:

- Mouth and eye care
- Changing nappies
- Getting you involved with feeding, even if it's just 1ml through a nasogastric tube
- Taking their temperature
- Bathing

## Reading, singing or talking

Talking, singing and communicating with your baby from day one will help the two of you get to know each other, and gives your child a great start in life. The stimulation of your voice and contact will help your baby develop and bond with you in the early days. You can read more on the benefits of Reading to your baby [here](#)

## Learn

Don't be afraid to ask questions and be your baby's best advocate. Speak with the doctors and nurses about your baby's progress and setbacks. If you don't understand, just ask them to explain again.

No question is too silly.

**Note:** If you are reading a hardcopy of this document and wish to look up the other material referenced (that can be found by clicking on links), these can be found at [www.neonataltrust.org.nz/support](http://www.neonataltrust.org.nz/support)

## Spend time

Whilst visiting your baby in the unit, just spend time with them. Turn off your cellphone and eliminate other distractions. Try not to worry about how they are doing but instead, focus on spending precious moments together.

Bonding with your sick or premature baby can often feel challenging to start with, especially when you see all that medical equipment. In most cases bonding will resolve itself with a bit of time. In a handful of cases however, it can take many months before a parent feels bonded to their child. This is still considered normal and there are good reasons why this happens to some people. If you are having ongoing trouble bonding with your baby don't be afraid to talk to your doctor.

Our brochure, [your emotions](#) also has some useful phone numbers and contacts if you need some help.

The most important thing is to continue to make sure your child is being cared for to the best of your ability. Keep kissing, cuddling and playing. Read and go for walks. Eventually your actions will be backed by a feeling of connection to that beautiful little person (or people, in the case of multiples).

