

## The NICU Roller Coaster

Many parents are distressed after the birth of their premature or sick baby. You may experience many emotions including sorrow, guilt, anger and regret. Love and joy are there, too, but sometimes the pain can overpower these good feelings.

As you face and learn to cope with your painful feelings, you will be better able to get to know and love your baby and experience the joy of new parenthood.

For many babies, the NICU stay is like a roller coaster ride, with ups and downs, triumphs and setbacks. Of course, the parents are also along for the ride. The following tips can help you deal with the ups and downs.

**Give yourself permission to cry and feel overwhelmed.** You may be concerned that if you let your feelings flow, you'll never be able to pull yourself back together. But you will. Allow yourself to feel this release of emotion.

**Establish a routine.** Find a way to balance work, home life and visiting the hospital. Allow yourself to leave your baby's side when you feel comfortable doing so. Your baby needs you, but it's also important to have time to yourself, with your partner and with your other children. Also take time to do things you enjoy, such as exercise. These restful breaks will help you find the strength to keep going.

**Connect with other NICU parents.** These parents share many of your feelings and struggles. Share your experiences, informally or in a support group. It's helpful to be surrounded by others who understand what you're going through. Ask NICU staff if there are graduate NICU parents with whom you can connect for support.

**Explore your spiritual side.** It might be helpful for you to reflect and lean on your personal spiritual perspective. You may find comfort speaking with a pastor, priest, rabbi, minister or imam. It is normal for this experience to challenge your religious and spiritual beliefs. In any case, remember that prayer, meditation or quiet reflection can help you find emotional strength and hope, and can guide you through this challenging time.

**Keep a journal.** Expressing your feelings on paper can help you cope with and move through them. A journal may also help strengthen your hope and patience, by reminding you how far you and your baby have come.

**Vent your frustrations.** If your baby has a setback, you may be plunged into fear and anxiety. Voice your fears, and hope for the best.

**Celebrate when you can.** When your baby makes progress, let yourself experience the joy.

**Accept the support of others.** Let people know how they can best help you. Go to [Family and Friends](#) for more information.

**Accept that you and your partner will react differently.** Share your experiences and listen with empathy so that you each can feel supported. Go to [You and Your Partner](#) for more information.