IDEAS FOR BONDING WITH YOUR BABY IN THE NICU

1. **Touch your baby.** When you touch your baby it releases positive hormones for both of you that decrease stress and increase feelings of attachment. You and your baby's medical team can figure out the best way to touch your baby based on their medical condition. It may be supportive touch, bundled holding, or skin-to-skin care (also called kangaroo care).
2. **Do as much of your baby's routine care as possible.** Each time you help your baby by changing their diaper, feeding them, bathing them, taking their temperature, or doing mouth care you will feel more connected to your baby. Ask for help as needed as you get more comfortable doing these care tasks.
3. **Have a "mindfulness moment" with your baby.** While you are touching your baby, focus in on one body part at a time, such as baby's hands. Notice each detail of how they look and feel while you are touching them. Pay attention to the smell of your baby's skin. Look at each tiny nail and finger one at a time. Take your time as you look at and appreciate each little part.
4. **Talk to your baby.** Babies recognize their parents' voices and find them comforting. Talking to your baby can help you feel more connected. Talk about your day or what you see baby doing.
5. **Create a hello and good-bye routine.** Each time you come to the NICU greet your baby in the same way with a gentle touch and kind words. Before you leave, read your baby a book or sing them a favorite song, and again offer a special, loving touch.
6. **Take pictures of your baby** each time you visit to document this moment in time and see their progress. You can share these pictures with the people who love them and use them to think about baby when you are away from the hospital.
7. **Exchange scent cloths.** Scent cloths are a piece of fabric that you use to pick up someone's scent. You can use two square or heart shaped pieces of fabric, or any other piece of cotton fabric that has been washed in scent-free detergent. Keep one near your skin, tucked in your shirt, to pick up your scent. Leave one in the isolette or crib to pick up baby's scent. **Then swap the cloths so baby has one that smells like you, and you take the one home that smells like baby.** Babies have a well-developed sense of smell and recognize their parents this way. **Smelling your scent will comfort your baby when you are away.**
8. **Bring a family picture or sibling's drawings to keep near your baby's bed space.** Even though baby is not looking at the pictures it can help bring your family closer to baby and reminds everyone who sees it who they are helping to take care of.
9. **Teach people about your baby's likes and dislikes.** Partner with your baby's nurse and create a list of what you have noticed that your baby likes and does not like. This could include use of a pacifier for support, comforting touch your baby likes, and care tasks that are harder for baby, so staff knows to provide more support at these times.

Adapted from *Bonding with Your Baby*, National Network for NICU Psychologists
Find more resources at nationalperinatal.org/psychologists