NICU 101
Navigating your NICU Stay

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Who are we and why are we talking about this?

Kristen Tippit - Co-Founder LOGiC.baby, former NICU mom

Mission: We teach parents about the NICU and empower them to engage and be present with their baby, their medical team, and their family, in the family-centered model of care.

Heather Nickelson - Founder of Mindful Momma Therapy & Perinatal Mental Health Occupational Therapist, Mom to 3 girls
What are we talking about today?

- Getting to know the NICU
- Preparing your mind and your family
- What does it mean to be an Advocate?
- Your Medical Team
- Support!
Getting to know the NICU

Why does a baby need a stay in the NICU?

Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) OR “Baby ICU”

★ Preterm birth (12% of US births)
★ Medical issues
★ Monitoring for resolution
Getting to know the NICU

Will I know ahead of time that my baby needs the NICU?

YES/MAYBE -

● If you are pregnant with multiples
● have your own medical issues that are being monitored & can affect baby
● if baby has been diagnosed with acute medical issues to be monitored,
● you or your baby has certain risk factors

NO -

● If your pregnancy is on track, no issues with baby
● If you don’t have risk factors or previous history with NICU

ALWAYS ASK OB if you have any concerns!
How long will my baby be in the NICU?

- No one size fits all answer
- Depends on infant state/needs
- ASK! - Your medical team can give ideas/estimates
Getting to know the NICU

What does it look like?

Ask for a tour!

- Private rooms/ Single Family Rooms
- Open Wards or Open Bay Units
- Common areas
- Nurse’s Stations/areas
Getting to know the NICU

What are all those machines?

- Warming table beds
- Aquarium beds (Isolettes)
- Breathing Support
- Feeding
- IV access
- So many wires!
Getting to know the NICU

What should I bring?

❖ Consider what you need throughout the day/night
❖ Comfortable - pillows/blankets/slippers/soft clothing
❖ Food/Drink - ask what the policy is - Ask about BF vouchers
❖ Medications/Health considerations
❖ Make a list

Take care of yourself!
Getting to know the NICU

Making Decisions

- Staying the night?
  - Keep an overnight bag with you just in case
- Donor Milk?
  - Safe, can be life-saving
- How involved can I be?
  - Changing diapers, skin to skin (Kangaroo Care!), Feeding, Bathing
  - ASK
Getting to know the NICU

Create a Schedule

❖ NICU care times - Rounds/Care times/Shift change
❖ What works best for YOU
❖ Communicate your plans! Medical team, friends/family
Preparing your mind and your family

Planning Ahead: If NICU stay is planned

❖ Preparing older children for an upcoming NICU stay - let them be curious and answer honestly!
❖ Preparing your support circle to support you
  ➢ Tell them HOW to help you
❖ Setting some intentions and maybe a mantra or two:
  ➢ “My body did not fail me, my body did everything it could.”
❖ Learn and understand the signs of PMADs and act quickly
Preparing your mind and your family

Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders (PMADs)

NICU stays are a risk factor for PMADs

❖ Expectation vs. reality
❖ Navigating the unknown creating immense stress
❖ Financial burden
❖ Missing time with other children (guilt)
❖ Loss of identity
❖ Grieving the loss of what was “supposed to happen”
Preparing your mind and your family

Symptoms of Common PMADs

**Depression:**
- Anger/ irritability, crying, and sadness
- Lack of interest in the baby or things you used to enjoy
- Appetite + sleep disturbance
- Feelings of guilt, shame, hopelessness
- Thoughts of harm

**Anxiety:**
- Constant worry or feeling that something bad is going to happen
- Racing thoughts
- Appetite and sleep disturbance
- Inability to sit still
- Physical symptoms like dizziness, hot flashes, and nausea

**OCD:**
- Obsessions / intrusive thoughts
- Compulsions: doing certain things over and over again to reduce fears and obsessions.
- Fear of being left alone with the infant
- Hypervigilance
Preparing your mind and your family

Managing Expectations

“This isn’t what I expected, wanted, or deserve”

❖ It is normal and ACCEPTABLE to feel _____ in the NICU (and after!)
❖ Give yourself permission to grieve the experience you didn’t get
❖ Shift focus from what went WRONG to what went RIGHT, from the negatives to the positives (when you’re ready).

➢ Examples: Supportive staff, learning how to advocate for your baby, making friends, developing confidence, baby is in great hands.

“I am disappointed, but I am doing the best I can with the cards I was dealt. I am a great parent”

“While I was at my weakest, lowest point... I was strongest for my baby”
Preparing your mind and your family

Self-care: A HOT topic!

What is self-care? ANYTHING that makes you feel better!

Three tenets of self-care:

- Self-care looks different for everyone
- It looks different for the same person on different days (high vs low)
- Self-care isn’t self-care unless it is GUILT FREE self-care

Self-Care in the hospital setting
Preparing your mind and your family

Health/Nutrition while in the NICU

Control what you can: Sustenance, movement, hydration, reflection

❖ Well balanced meals: protein, carbs, healthy fats
➢ The postpartum period is a period of recovery - eat for fuel
❖ Movement when possible, however possible - a slow walk in the garden is all you need (vitamin D from the sun is a bonus!)
➢ Stretching is great for the static posturing while in the hospital
❖ Vitamins / minerals important in the postpartum period
❖ REST + SLEEP: mental, emotional, physical implications
Preparing your mind and your family

Good parents take breaks!

“When you feel the need to speed up, slow down.”

❖ Self-regulation happens when we slow it down, not speed it up
❖ Stress can be felt by our families, even our babies in the NICU
➢ This helps with co-regulation, important for our families
❖ When able, take a break. You deserve it. Your babies have THE BEST caring for them, use them.
What does it mean to be an ADVOCATE?

What is advocacy and why does it matter?

“The act of speaking on the behalf of or in support of another person, place, or thing”

- You know your baby best!
- Speak for those that can’t
- Good practice for life
What does it mean to be an ADVOCATE?

What is your communication/learning style?

How do you receive and learn information?

- Auditory
- Written
- Visual
- Combo?

Tell medical team your preference/Ask for what you need!

Ex. If you are someone who learns by reading, ask for a written explanation of what is going on. That might be a handout about a procedure they want to do, or just a written explanation of the plan of care.
What does it mean to be an ADVOCATE?

Communicating needs

● None of us are mind-readers!
● Make a Communication plan
● Ask for what you need
● Reinforce your requests
What does it mean to be an ADVOCATE?

Examples of language to use

“I didn’t quite understand what you said, can you go over it again?”

“I’m feeling a bit lost with all this information, can you come back in a little while so we can talk about it again?”

“Can we have the whole team meet later today or tomorrow to make sure we are on the same page?”

“I noticed (fill in the blank) seemed different today, can someone help me understand what’s going on?”

“I felt like that nurse/doc/specialist wasn’t hearing me, is there someone else I can speak to?”
Who is your medical team?

- Nurses
- Attending Neonatologist
- Fellows
- Residents
- Specialists (Cardiac, Endocrinology, Gastroenterology, etc.)
- Therapists (OT, PT, Speech)
- Lactation Consultants
- YOU
How to build good relationships with your team!

❖ Assume Goodwill
❖ Take care
❖ Be open and honest
❖ Ask questions - Personal and medical
❖ Ask to be involved!
What kind of support do you need?

- Food
- Animal care
- Babysitting
- Home care
- Check-ins
- Therapy/Support Groups
- Online support
How to communicate with Family & Friends about the NICU

➔ Designate a point person
➔ Emails/Calls/Texts
➔ Marco Polo - Otter in the NICU
It’s ok to need support
It’s ok to ask for it
It’s ok to not want support
It’s ok to ask for space
It’s ok to not know what you need
Questions?
Observations?
Feedback?

We are here for you (especially online!) FB, IG, TikTok, YouTube
@logicdotbaby, YouTube channel is: NICU Coach
@heather__nickelson