

UNDERSTANDING THE NEED FOR PARENT SUPPORT IN THE NICU

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Giving birth to a premature infant can be a devastating life experience. Along with the joy and incredible love a parent feels, comes many overwhelming emotions such as fear, guilt, anger, and loneliness. Surviving and coping with these stressful emotions is critical to your emotional and physical health.

Every parent copes differently with these stressful times. There are even unique differences in the way husbands and wives cope. Men often take the idealistic approach, trying hard to see the positive in the situation. They may need to try and “fix” whatever they can, and they may have a hard time showing their emotions. Women, on the other hand, are frequently very emotional and more “realistic” about the situation, and they actively seek support from those around them. Whatever your coping strategy may be, it’s important to understand that you are grieving in your own special way, and that having a premature infant is an extremely traumatic life event that will create many levels of different emotions.

Studies have shown that parents (and their preemies) will benefit from support throughout the hospital stay, and after their babies are discharged home. Try to find others around you who have experienced having a preemie, such as a support group in the NICU or even on the internet (www.preemie-l.org). Your family and friends may or may not understand what you are going through; try and use the support of those who you feel have compassion for your situation. If needed, don’t hesitate to seek professional help. You are not a failure for seeking support, you are only helping yourself and your child.