

## What I'd Like You to Know About My Life As A Premie Parent

Maybe you have been inside the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) for a visit or perhaps you have visited me at home during the times I was there. As fascinating as a “tiny baby” may seem, there are things I want you to know that could help me greatly as I focus on the journey through the NICU and, hopefully, to come home with my baby.

- *It scares me to visit the NICU but I want to in order to be with my child and to care for his/her needs as best I can. I will need to figure out the appropriate amount of time to stay at the NICU and all I need from you is a shoulder, a hug, or a kind comment. Telling me how to handle this situation from the outside is not going to help.*
- *I often feel like an outsider in the NICU and even at home. The early birth of my baby turned me inside out physically and mentally. Nothing seems normal anymore. I am doing my best to create a “new normal.” This event has changed my life permanently in many ways.*
- *Just because the baby is gaining weight or coming off medical equipment does not mean that everything is now “better.” My baby could take a turn for the worse at any moment and I am really worried about him/her.*
- *It is hard to be around pregnant women right now, since I feel as though I failed in my pregnancy. Even if it wasn't my fault and we have no idea what happened, I still cannot help but feel guilty. My baby should be in my womb right now, all safe and snug, not hooked up to medical equipment. If you are pregnant, please understand I am not angry with you but I may not want to be around you or celebrate in your joy right now. I need time to adjust to this new reality.*
- *Sometimes I just want to be left alone. Sometimes I want people around me helping me. This can change in a day, in an hour, in a minute. Please know that this stress is normal for a premie parent and your understanding goes a long way.*
- *Bringing my baby home is exciting yet terrifying. All of a sudden the baby's care is all on me. It is not like bringing home a normal full-term baby. My baby had a rough start and the NICU has trained me in the ways to care for my premie. It may not look like the way you took care of your babies or it may seem extreme to you. But know that I am listening to doctors and nurses who are giving me excellent advice. I know you want to help the baby to thrive. If we ask you to wash hands or not visit, please listen to me.*
- *The best baby shower gift you can give me is your ongoing understanding and your respect regarding my care of my premie. We do not know what the future holds with our baby and we will be watching over him/her closely for years to come. Whatever comes our way, we still love our child.*