



# Parents are Key in Helping in the **NICU**

**Dräger**

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### Parents are key in helping in the NICU

As I stared at my daughter in her incubator, frozen in place by fear and worry and huge doubt about my place as a mother, I figured the medical team surrounding her knew her better than I did and knew better how to take care of her. Other than providing breastmilk, I was basically providing my child with the minimum of care. Heck, what did I know?

Apparently I knew more than I realized. My fears were well-founded but my brain knew way more as it turned out. My daughter and I were strongly connected from conception and her frustrated cries sent me into action without realizing it.

Yet I sat or stood by her incubator day after day feeling like a total visitor. Even doing the "womb hold" with her did little to make me feel like a parent. As my daughter worked through various challenges all I could do was standby and nervously stare at her struggle.

Along the way, my mother-in-law, a former OB nurse, wondered aloud one day when I would be able to do "Kangaroo Care." I stared at her and then wondered in my head where this "kangaroo" actually was in the NICU. Kid you not, I literally had no clue what Kangaroo Care was at the time. All I knew was that if this was something I could do for my daughter I was going to pester the nurses until I got to do it. So the next visit I brought it up and I was told to come back the next day wearing a button down shirt with no bra. I did so and the nurse hauled out a strange looking pool side chair beside my daughter's bed and



told me to lay down in it. Then she put Becky, diaper only onto my bare chest. Now I want to tell you that this was a magical moment between mother and daughter and that birds were singing, harps were playing and everyone in attendance was going “Awww!” but that would be lying. My daughter’s body was cold and clammy and she felt like a wriggling bug on my chest. There you have it, my gloriously sad Mom Moment. I was still trying to figure out what this Kangaroo Care thing was and how it was supposed to help my daughter. As Becky settled in on my chest, I couldn’t see her expression but my husband was gob-smacked. “You have got to see the look on Becky’s face!” he announced in shock. I looked at him like he was crazy and asked if he had a mirror. No, so he opted for the camera instead. **What I saw in that picture was amazing. A blissfully sleeping Becky. I looked up at my daughter’s monitors and realized her vitals were stable where they weren’t before the session. Afterward at home, my milk supply increased significantly.** I became an instant fan of Kangaroo Care and pushed for it regularly most days we were there. Finally I could do something to help comfort and nurture my daughter.

As Becky’s NICU stay progressed she overcame many obstacles and slowly we were able to achieve another parenting moment - the first bath. Again I was terrified of touching my fragile daughter thinking I was going to hurt her. But the NICU Nurse guided me through the removal of clothing, diaper, leads, oxygen, and more. I then put Becky into the water and she wailed. Surrounding me with the nurse were my mother and my husband. Lots of humorous commentary followed as my husband filmed the whole thing. I held it together still feeling nervous. My daughter calmed and resigned herself to the bath. At one point as I scrubbed her with the soap I did a little massage on her back. She relaxed and seemed to like it. “Ah, you like massage,” I said aloud to her. In my mind, I was doing a Happy Mama Dance. I could do this for her . . . I could help her relax, I could be her Mother and nurture her and care for her. I could do this.

A couple of weeks later, Becky came home on medical equipment and while it was a rocky transition tarnished by a re-hospitalization related to feeding issues, a large weight drop and breathing problems, things did smooth out. I ended up doing Kangaroo Care at home prior to naps and even as a way to celebrate my first Mother’s Day with her. Infant massage became a regular nightly thing with her with baths and she reaped incredible benefits from it. With solid weight gain, strong growth patterns, consistent and healthy sleep she thrived at home. And best of all, she and I had a strong, loving bond that despite flare-ups of teenage girl/Mom drama has been sustained.

**I have learned that parents in the NICU matter to the long-term prognosis of their child. We need to help families bond during the NICU stay, and work around the barriers of medical equipment to help everyone thrive.** Separating families from one another except in the face of the most dire of medical scenarios where stimulation is not helpful, must be abated. There is research that points directly to all that I have witness and more in terms of the benefits of the parents’ usefulness in the NICU. So let’s figure out how to make that happen with greater consistency. Doing so will affect that family more positively long-term than people realize.

For more information visit [www.babyfirst.com](https://www.babyfirst.com)

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