



# Info-sheet for Parents

## Modified skin to skin and hand-hugs

Skin to skin cuddles (also known as kangaroo care) is the best cuddle you can offer your baby in the neonatal unit. The heat generated from your body during skin to skin helps to keep your baby warm and calm, helping them get into and stay in a deeper sleep which supports their growing brain.

However, holding or cuddling your baby in the NICU can depend upon their medical condition and is not always possible. There are other options you can utilize to provide your baby with support and to facilitate closeness in the NICU, we will describe them in this information sheet.

### Modified skin to skin cuddles

Is a form of skin to skin which uses the same principles as traditional skin to skin (the baby is placed against your chest), the only difference is the baby stays in the bed during the cuddle. Modified skin to skin can be used for babies who cannot be moved from their bed due to their clinical condition or if they have medical equipment in place that limits their movement.



#### Modified skin to skin tips:

- Make sure you are comfortable and ready to go
- Wear a button-down shirt or gown with opening at the front to make it easier to access your chest for skin to skin contact
- The NICU staff will help you identify a comfortable seat and lower your baby's bed so you can lean over at a comfortable height
- Your baby will be positioned facing you with their skin in direct contact with your skin
- Place your arm around your baby's legs holding their bottom and cradling their head in a flexed position
- Enjoy your cuddle! Talk to your baby and stroke their skin. You may want to ask the NICU staff to take some photos
- Let the staff know if you have any concerns or are feeling uncomfortable!

### How long should I do modified skin to skin for?

For as long as you and your baby are comfortable. We recommend one hour for the baby to receive the benefits of skin to skin

## Hand Hugs

Hand hugs are another way for you to provide your baby with some skin-to-skin touch when they are unable to be held. Like modified skin to skin, your baby will benefit from direct contact with your skin.

Hand hugs or hand hugging is where you place one hand gently against your baby's feet and the other gently across their belly or resting against their head. We recommend if possible, placing your hands against your baby's feet and belly as this offers the most skin to skin contact and comfort for your baby.

Hand hugs can be used as a substitute for skin to skin cuddles, they can also be used to help support your baby before, during and after painful or uncomfortable procedures to help reduce pain and stress, and during other routine interventions in the NICU like a nappy change. A hand hug not only provides your baby with positive support it can help them go to sleep after the interaction.



### Hand hug tips:

- Wash your hands and warm them by rubbing together before starting
- Make sure you are comfortable and ready to go
- The NICU staff will help you identify a comfortable seat and lower your baby's bed so you can rest your hands at a comfortable height
- Start with resting your hands with no movement, if your baby is comfortable, you can try stroking them, preferably use long strokes that are not too light as this can be over stimulating
- Talk to your baby and ask the NICU staff to take some photos

The team in the neonatal unit can help you to implement modified skin to skin or hand hugs for your baby. It is important to remember that your baby's needs may change over time, and this may affect how they respond to the support you offer them. Observing your baby's cues and reducing the amount of stimulation may help. You can refer to our other information sheets for additional information on how you can support your baby in the NICU.

Our goal is to work with you in caring for your baby if you have any questions, please let a member of our team know how we can help you.