Family leaders from the MS-CHONY Family Advisory Council offer many suggestions to NICU parents. These parents were once in your shoes and want to offer you support and a few ‘pearls’ that helped them through their NICU journey.

These are just a few and over time you will develop a few tips of your own. Please keep in mind that every baby and family is unique, and we encourage every parent to consult with their baby’s nurse or physician about what is best for the particular circumstances of their baby.

For ease and simplicity, our Family leaders divided the tips into three categories; the first is called: ‘Taking Care of Baby’; this section focuses on suggestions and tips geared to the care of your baby. The next section is called: ‘Taking Care of Yourself’; which is geared to meeting your needs as a parent, and the last section is called: ‘Taking Care of Business’ these are tips to help keep matters organized as this time can be most disorganized.

**Taking Care of Your Baby**

- Wash your hands before touching your baby or your baby’s items. Ask others to do the same.
- Ask about Kangaroo Care (skin-to-skin contact) as soon as possible after delivery. Both Moms and Dads can practice Kangaroo Care.
  - Parents recommend button-down shirts to facilitate Kangaroo Care
- Touch or hold your baby as much as permitted. If you have not been able to hold your baby yet, ask each day if it is safe to do so.
- Try to be involved in as much of your baby’s care as possible. This can include changing diapers, bathing, feeding.
- Ask about breastfeeding, pumping and lactation support. If you are going to breastfeed, make sure the instructions are clear to every nurse.
• Bring touches of home: use receiving blankets for your baby’s bedding and for swaddling; tape photos of siblings and family to the “isolette.”

• Let your baby get to “know” you:
  - Talk to your baby often in a soft, soothing voice
  - Read books to your baby
  - Bring a tape recorder to leave in the incubator with tapes of parents reading, singing or telling stories
  - Bring in receiving blankets with which you have slept, so that they carry your scent. Ask the nurse to place them under your baby

• Cover the incubator, especially if near a window.

• Bring in some preemie clothes - even a hat or socks, something to add a touch of pink or blue. There is a drawer in the incubator to store some clothing items for the baby. T-shirts are best, styles to look for are side snap or velcro or full snap or velcro down the front to allow for easy on & off access around tubes & wires.

• For older, more developed babies - mobiles and or a bright, colorful toys to capture their attention

• Learn what you can about your baby’s condition. Do not hesitate to ask questions - about caring for your baby, your baby’s condition, tests and results, and the overall plan for care

• Call for regular updates, ask for a “recap” prior to the end of a shift. It also helps to ask your nurse when is the best time to call in order to avoid the times when your nurse may not be available.

• Know who is in charge of your baby’s care and how to reach your baby’s nurse

• Trust your instincts, speak up, and be your baby’s advocate.
**Taking Care of Yourself**

- This is a difficult time, and it is expected that you will feel overwhelmed at times. You need to take care of yourself so you can take care of your family.
  - Eat
  - Stay hydrated (especially if breastfeeding)
  - Get sleep
  - Take breaks
  - Get outside as the weather permits (walk in the garden, eat out)
- Closets are available for parents' storage of non-valuables. Consider keeping:
  - A toiletry kit (toothbrush, mouthwash, soap, brush, contact lens solution, flip flops for the shower).
  - An energy bar or snack and a bottle of water for busy days or for when you just find it difficult to leave the bedside
  - A sweater or sweatshirt.
  - A pillow for the chairs; post-partum moms may want a foot stool for swelling ankles
  - A boppy pillow to help support baby and tubing
- Have on hand small bills and change for vending machines
- Seek support that is positive; if you need help finding support, or a particular support group, please ask a social worker.
- Say “yes” to offers of help - meals, rides for other children. People want to help. You need it. Let them.
- Talk with other NICU parents - they can relate to your experience.
- Be kind to yourself. This can be a stressful and emotional time. There will be good days and bad, successes and setbacks. We know this is hard, but try to take it “one day at a time.”

**Taking Care of Business**

- Keep a “care notebook”. Write down everything - your questions, daily updates, physician names, your nurse for the day, weight log, medications, your feelings, lab and test results. Many parents have found this type of record extremely helpful for being an advocate for their children - during and after their NICU stay.
• If possible, have someone with you to listen and take notes when talking to doctors about tests, results, upcoming procedures, etc. It is hard to absorb so much information at a difficult time.

• Consider creating a web based care page to keep family and friends updated.

• Talk to Social Work and find out about any eligible benefits (e.g., Social Security, etc.) and how to register for any services

• Label items you bring from home

• Leave a disposable camera near the bedside in case you forget to bring in your camera. Take pictures. You will appreciate having them someday.