**Becoming a Family Integrated Care (FICare) Veteran Parent – A Parent’s Guide for New Centers**

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The objectives of this document are to:

* Offer techniques to approach new NICU parents at their baby’s bedside
* Provide a list of general things to say and do that will make new parents feel more comfortable
* Answer questions you may have when becoming a veteran parent

Below, 7 steps are listed to help you transition into the role of veteran parent:

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| Step Number | Direction | Comment |
| 1 | Write down your personal experiences in the NICU (i.e. when was your child(ren) born, what was his/her weight, what were the circumstances that led to your child being born prematurely). | A great deal of the interaction you have with new NICU parents will rely on your personal experiences. It is important to refresh your memory, which can help you decide your readiness in becoming a veteran parent. |
| 2 | Meet with a psychologist or social worker and share your story with them. | Often the memory of the NICU can be an emotional one. It is important to be comfortable with your experiences, and to have the opportunity to share them with someone other than new NICU parents. When you speak with NICU parents, the interaction must be one to support them; they should not be put in a position to support you. |
| 3 | Visit the NICU again. Scrub in, listen to the sounds, and reflect on how you react to the smells, alarms, and people. | Take note of your triggers. Did the experience cause you to have less or more closure with your own birth/NICU story? After this visit, do you still feel capable of providing positive support to other families? If you are not ready, it is important to share this with a staff member. |
| 4 | Meet with the designated staff member to decide how you will provide support (i.e. one-to-one, parent groups, committee work, etc). | Review the processes of parent involvement, parent information, and any changes in the NICU that are specific to parents. Decide on and arrange for a regular volunteer time (1-3 hours weekly to start), and a regular way to participate (i.e. at the bed side, during group sessions, accompanying parents for coffee or lunch breaks etc. – make it consistent for the first several months). |
| 5 | Meet with the social worker or psychologist for a second time. | Have them explain how they approach parents, what introductions they use, and how they explain the circle of care, confidentiality. Have them instruct you on how to communicate with parents and on your role in the circle of care (i.e. parents should be aware that things they share with you that cause you to be concerned about their well-being must be communicated to your contact on the team – most of the time you will be a kind listening ear with a great deal of empathy). |
| 6 | Arrange a first NICU visit with your designated staff member and ensure that you have a contact person for any questions or concerns. Ensure that the NICU is aware of your participation and your role. | Go through the regular routine of checking in with your team contact (sometimes that is the site coordinator, charge nurse, social worker or psychologist – it should be the same person at each visit); consult the communication binder, get a “de-brief” about the current families (are they having good or bad days, what is happening in general, etc.). Ask to be introduced to the families during your first few visits. |
| 7 | Expand your involvement – if you were only engaging parents at the bedside, begin attending education sessions. Attend a lunch and learn to educate nurses and physicians. Arrange to have more graduate NICU parents join you in the veteran parent role. | Attend an education session that is already planned, provide the parent perspective, participate in any staff education forums and the new staff orientation– share your story with them. Help them understand that what they say and do and how they say and do it can improve or deteriorate the day in the life of the NICU parent. Start a social support group for graduate parents; enlist those who are interested in participating as a veteran parent. Encourage other veteran parent’s to help you arrange activities/food on “special” days, i.e. Valentine’s day, Mother’s/Father’s day, Kangaroo Day. Help them through this process. |

**Ways to approach a new NICU parent at their baby’s bedside: Things to do and say to make new NICU parents feel more comfortable**

* Introduce yourself as a veteran parent in the NICU, and share a little about yourself and your NICU story (eg. how many children you have, how long you stayed in the NICU)
* Ask to be introduced to their baby and compliment them both (be genuine). Make sure not to touch anything, move curtains with your elbows, and avoid touching the baby’s area or the parent.
* Restrain yourself from saying “Everything will be alright.” A parent will want to hear this and may try to force you to say it. Instead, help the parent to face reality in a positive way.
* Get them water
* NO MEDICAL INFORMATION SHOULD BE OFFERED
* Offer your experience in relation to their current experience, answer their

questions, and be truthful if they ask about your child today (If there are any special needs-based on the debrief you received from your contact).

* Remember that empathic listening is the most important skill. EMPATHY is the ability to understand another person’s ideas and feelings. It is gaining an understanding through listening and demonstrating that understanding by responding.
* As parents who have had a baby in the NICU, you are better able than anyone else to listen, understand, and communicate that understanding to new parents of NICU babies
* Tell them you know its not fair, and that they deserved things that they missed out on (eg. a baby shower, the maternity walk, labor, to push, etc)