



NICU Volunteers – Our Helping Hands

Whānau/Family Information – Neonatal Services

Volunteer cuddling

Our aim is to support whānau (family) to be with their pēpi (baby/ies) as much as possible. Every attempt is made to lessen any barriers that prevent parents from being with their pēpi while they are cared for in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU).

Life does not stop when you have a pēpi in NICU and often parents cannot be in the nursery with their pēpi as much as they would like.

It is important for pēpi to have human contact. The human touch provided by cuddling helps with a pēpi's social, emotional and physical development. It builds trust, reduces stress, and can even improve weight gain. We have volunteers who can provide some of this contact when you cannot be there. They spend time in the NICU holding, cuddling and talking to the pēpi.

A volunteer should not be seen as a replacement for the pēpi's whānau, but as a support to the whānau in the instances when it is not possible for the mama (mother) or other whānau members to be present.

Volunteer time with other children

It can be difficult spending time with your new pēpi when you have other tamariki (children) to care for.

Our volunteers can also help entertain siblings, allowing you the time to care for your newborn.

Your consent

We will only invite a NICU volunteer to be with your pēpi or your other tamariki if you give your informed consent. Our staff will record your verbal consent with the details of your choices about volunteers in your pēpi's clinical notes. You are welcome to modify or withdraw your consent and ask further questions about the volunteer programme at any time.

Is my pēpi ready for volunteer cuddles?

In addition to your consent, the neonatal team will talk with your pēpi's doctor to confirm that the pēpi is well enough for cuddling by a volunteer, taking into account the pēpi's health and care they are receiving.

Volunteer backgrounds

All our NICU volunteers complete health screenings, a police background check, interviews and a special training program which includes learning about infection risks and an understanding of patient confidentiality.

Volunteers are directly supervised by the nursing staff.

During a cuddling session volunteers stay seated in the pēpi's NICU room while a nurse places the infant in their arms. Volunteers are encouraged to soothe, sing and read to the pēpi while holding them. They will not provide care such as feeding or nappy changing.

Further information

Please talk with your nursing team if you would like more information about this programme.

