

Post-Traumatic Stress

Being in the NICU is stressful. With time and support, most of us will feel better. But sometimes the distress stays with us and makes it difficult to cope.

After the trauma has ended

When something traumatic happens, we can feel overwhelmed and out-of-control. Once the traumatic event is over, we can begin to relax, make sense of what happened, and recover. But **sometimes the uncomfortable feelings don't go away** - and we can feel stuck in the overwhelming emotions. Instead of feeling like danger has passed, we feel like it will never end.

Why you may be feeling this way

When you're in the NICU you and your baby may go through a series of **repeated, traumatic events**. It's normal to feel worried, anxious, and afraid.

The stress you're feeling may have started before your baby was admitted to the NICU. About **1 out of 3 NICU mothers** and **1 out of 4 NICU fathers** report that their babies' delivery was traumatic.



How common is it

We know that **40% of parents report clinically-significant post-traumatic stress** up to a month after their babies are born.

While stress levels tend to go down - and most parents begin to feel better - **a third of parents** had signs and symptoms **a year later**.



Things that can help

- getting enough **sleep**
- **social support** from peers
- some prescribed **medications**
- trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapies (**TF-CBT**)
- cognitive restructuring (**CBT**)
- **narrative therapy**
- eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (**EMDR**)

What you can do

Post-traumatic stress is a sign that **your body and your brain are struggling to understand how to keep you safe**. Instead of recognizing when danger has passed, we can become hyper-vigilant. We try to **predict danger, so we can avoid it**. When this happens, it helps to:

- surround ourselves with people who help us feel safe
- learn skills that help us soothe our nervous system
- find ways to safely express our feelings
- talk to someone we trust
- go outside and move our body
- make time to rest, eat, and sleep

Trauma-informed care

Some of us have experienced abuse or neglect at the hands of people who were supposed to care for us.

If you've had bad experiences before, **pregnancy care, childbirth, and being in the hospital can bring back powerful and overwhelming emotions**. When this happens, you deserve care that acknowledges this trauma - and responds to it with kindness.

Trauma-informed care (TIC) is care where you and your providers collaborate in ways that promote **safety, trust, and transparency**. When we engage in trauma-informed care, we can both minimize the negative effects of past traumas and avoid being re-traumatized by what's happening now.

People do not need to know what kinds of trauma you've experienced in order to deliver trauma-informed care.

Trauma-informed, trauma-responsive care is for everyone.

SAFETY

TRUST

TRANSPARENCY

COLLABORATION

EMPOWERMENT

VOICE

CHOICE

RESPECT

RESPONSIVENESS

Our hearts can
be whole again.

Even if it feels
like they've been
broken into a
million pieces.



Post-traumatic growth

We can **create new meaning** from traumatic events in our lives.

We can learn **new skills** and **more helpful ways of responding and coping** when bad things happen. Knowing that we've overcome challenges can help us feel **stronger** and **more resilient**.

