

# Kangaroo Care Key Messages for Healthcare Providers

## What is Kangaroo Care?

Kangaroo Care is the skin-to-skin holding of a baby (wearing only a diaper) against a parent's bare chest, secured with a wrap.



## Guiding Principles for Kangaroo Care

- 1 Create an environment that supports both physical and emotional closeness between the preterm infant and parent immediately after birth and during the infant's stay in the hospital
- 2 Support parents as primary caregivers and as vital members of the healthcare team
- 3 Support Kangaroo Care as the standard place of care that is essential for all newborns
- 4 Initiate Kangaroo Care as early as possible after birth and for as long as possible

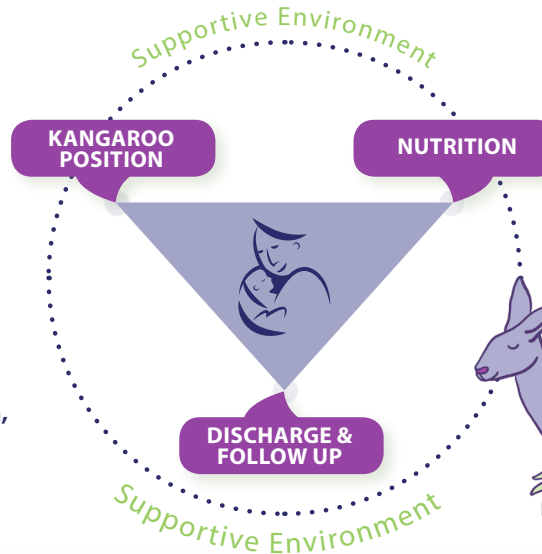
## Kangaroo Care is Made of 3 Important Parts:

### KANGAROO POSITION

Skin-to-skin contact between a parent and infant in an upright position

### DISCHARGE & FOLLOW UP

Care and support of the infant-parent dyad without separation, ensuring physical and mental well-being, with timely discharge home and appropriate follow-up.



### NUTRITION

Breastfeeding and human milk production are supported by Kangaroo Care.

Kangaroo Care is good for all infants regardless of infant feeding choice.



## The Importance of Kangaroo Care for the Infant and Family

*There are many ways that Kangaroo Care improves immediate and long-term outcomes for infants and families.*

### For Infants

- Stabilises heart and breathing rate
- Maintains temperature
- Reduces infection by colonising with family bacteria versus hospital bacteria
- Improves quality and duration of sleep
- Improves neurodevelopment
- Enhances early breastfeeding behaviours

### For Families

- May reduce risk of depression and anxiety
- Helps with bonding and attachment
- Improves breast milk supply
- Improves breastfeeding success long-term, in exclusivity and duration
- Increases parents' confidence in ability to care for their infant

# Key Factors that Affect Preterm Infant Outcomes

## Parental Separation and Interaction

- The standard of care for all newborns and parents is to not separate at birth, no matter how prematurely an infant is born
- Early life separation can alter physiological stability, epigenetics, and the developing brain
- Prolonged separation may alter bonding, attachment, and later mutual interactions
- Parent-infant interactions shape the development of an infant's response to stress

## Environmental Stimulation

- The preterm infant brain learns partly from sensory experiences in their environment
- The sensory environment of the NICU (bright lights, loud noises, procedural touch) may cause stress and harm to the infant
- Positive and negative sensory experiences can impact neurodevelopment

## Caregiving Experience

- In the hospital, infants do not have constant positive tactile stimuli or buffering from amniotic fluid
- Tactile stimulation may be procedural and sometimes painful in the NICU
- Routine care giving activities like diaper changes may cause stress and disorganisation when age appropriate positioning and postural support is not provided

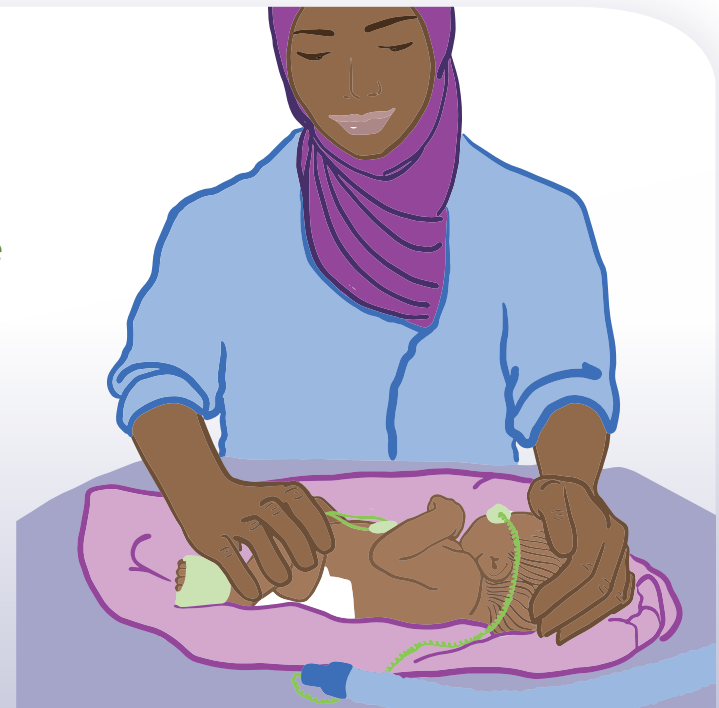


**A supportive environment is crucial for achieving positive results and promoting Kangaroo Care as a standard of care.**

*Every touch, social interaction, and environment the preterm infant encounters affects brain development and contributes to their long term developmental outcomes.*

## Guiding Principles to Promote Optimal Neurodevelopment

- ✓ Support Kangaroo Care as the biologically normal place of care.
- ✓ Reduce light exposure as much as possible.
- ✓ Reduce environmental noises. Speak quietly, reduce alarm volumes, practice gentle closing of incubator doors.
- ✓ Protect from noxious odours. Provide positive olfactory experiences with early human milk tastes and smells.
- ✓ Provide gentle tactile stimulation. Use gentle touch, promote undisturbed rest, avoid clustering many distressing procedures together.
- ✓ Provide support and containment for every painful procedure with Kangaroo Care.
- ✓ Understand infant stress signals and how to provide comfort.
- ✓ Provide age-appropriate and supportive positioning, if unable to do Kangaroo Care.



## Promoting and Protecting Infant Sleep



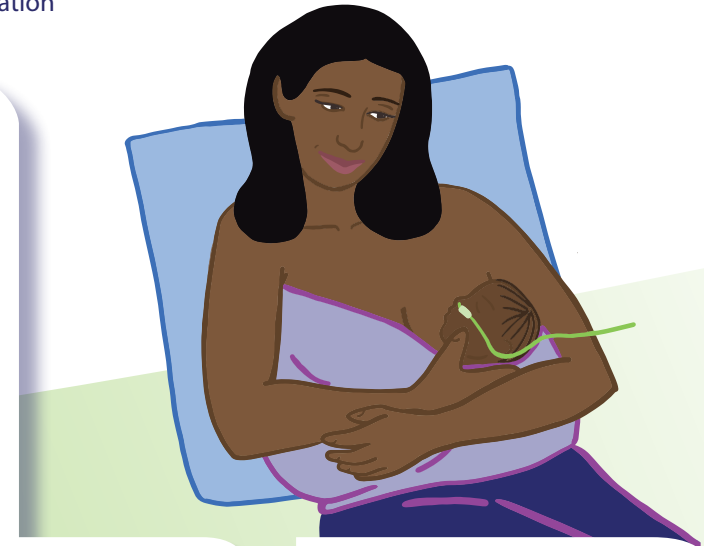
- Preterm infants build their brains during sleep
- Kangaroo Care promotes optimal sleep cycles
- Infants sleep best in the Kangaroo Position
- Sleep is needed to regulate body systems, store energy, and develop the senses
- Sensory information is organised into long-lasting brain circuits, pathways, and connections during rapid eye movement sleep
- Healthcare providers can optimise brain growth by ensuring preterm infants have long periods of sleep in the Kangaroo position
- Protect sleep cycles by doing routine care during natural sleep and wake cycles and supporting families to do Kangaroo Care for long periods of time

## Promoting and Protecting Infant Neurodevelopment

- Preterm birth interrupts rapid brain growth in the third trimester
- Preterm infants are developmentally unprepared for the sensory input of the NICU
- Preterm infants are separated from their family, exposed to bright lights and loud noises, temperature fluctuations, and touch that is procedural, uncomfortable and sometimes painful
- Kangaroo Care is neuroprotective by lessening the impact from stimulation and experiences
- Healthcare providers can work together with parents to minimise the impact of the NICU experience
- Support families to hold their infant in Kangaroo Care for as long as possible
- Educate and mentor families to modify the environment and provide positive stimulation

## Promoting Kangaroo Care

- The presence of specific medical conditions, equipment, or mode of delivery does not exclude an infant and their family from Kangaroo Care. Discuss with the healthcare team if you are unsure.
- Support families to do Kangaroo Care for longer periods of time, for as long as the family wants to, with the goal of at least 1 hour and up to 24 hours a day.
- One hour provides enough time for recovery from the transfer, regulation of physiological parameters, and completion of at least one sleep cycle.
- Support families to use standing transfers to pick up their infants for Kangaroo Care.
- Support mothers to breastfeed during Kangaroo Care when their infant shows feeding cues.
- Safe infant feeding can occur in Kangaroo Care when the wrap is pulled down below the infant's neck.



## Kangaroo Care wraps

Kangaroo Care Wraps are used to keep an infant secure against the parent, prevent heat loss, and allow parents to be hands free and comfortable.

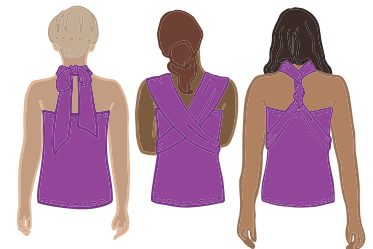
*Follow the manufacturer's instructions for information on safe positioning, mobility while using the wrap and best ways to secure the wrap.*



Basic bandeau



Kangaroo Care wrap with straps



Ways to tie the wrap securely and support mobility

# Key Kangaroo Care Messages for Families

## Planning and assessment for Kangaroo Care

- Discuss Kangaroo Care for all infants, especially those that may require additional planning and preparation for transfer
- Assess parent's Kangaroo Care knowledge and experience
- Discuss the steps for transfer and picking up their infant with the parents
- Infant may take up to 15 minutes to regulate and return to baseline vital signs during and after the transfer
- Routine care and procedures can continue during Kangaroo Care
- Ensure parents are comfortable prior to and during Kangaroo Care
- Follow hospital policy for ongoing infant assessment while in Kangaroo Care

*Facilitate open discussion about safer infant sleep practices in the NICU and at home by using the Safer Infant Sleep Support Tool*

## Safe sleep practices while using a Kangaroo Care wrap in the NICU

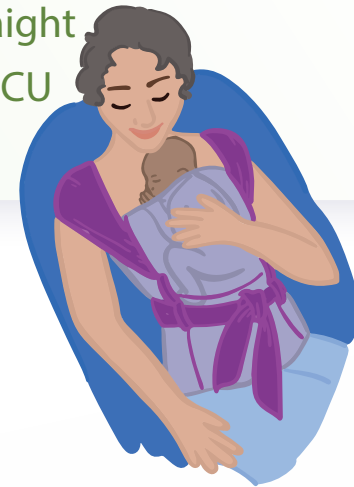
- Infant is safely secured and positioned in the Kangaroo Care wrap
- Infant is connected to a monitor
- Parent is in a semi-reclined position, never flat

## Safe sleep practices while using a Kangaroo Care wrap at home

- When the infant is no longer on a monitor, it is best for a parent to remain awake during Kangaroo Care
- Support safer infant sleep by creating a safer sleep plan that works for each family and respects cultural traditions by using the Safer Sleep for my Baby handout and the Honouring Our Babies Toolkit

# Kangaroo Care Safer Positioning Checklist

- ✓ Parent is in a semi-reclined position, not flat
- ✓ Infant's back is covered (with a wrap or blanket)
- ✓ Infant is well-flexed on parent's chest
- ✓ Infant's shoulders are flat against parent's chest
- ✓ Infant's head is turned to one side, sniffing position
- ✓ Infant's nose and mouth are uncovered
- ✓ Infant's face can be seen by parent
- ✓ Infant's trunk and neck are straight
- ✓ Infant is on a monitor in the NICU



We use the term **Kangaroo Care** to refer to the practice of early and prolonged skin-to-skin contact between a caregiver and an infant in a neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). Use of the term Kangaroo Care recognizes all types of parents and families.

