

Wee Reads is here at UCSD NICU!

What is it?

Wee Reads is a reading program championed by a collaborative effort between the Developmental Care Committee and the Concierge/Cuddler Volunteer Program. Books and education will be provided to parents so they know how significant the gift of reading to their infants (aka shared reading) can be. Staff and volunteers will also be encouraged to read to the infants as part of an integrated developmental plan of care.

Why read to our babies?

We are excitedly awaiting our move to Jacobs Medical Center, consisting entirely of single patient rooms. The driver for single patient rooms is to increase family visitation and is largely driven by the family centered model. Although single patient rooms boost family involvement, preliminary studies show infants cared for in a single room environment have decreased cerebral maturation scores, lower language and lower motor development scores as well as more externalizing (negative) behaviors at the age of 2. Mothers also report more stress and isolation during a NICU stay in single patient rooms. In addition, our high risk population is already more likely to have lower IQ scores and poorer developmental outcomes. Many are also from high risk backgrounds that lack the environments to promote language and literacy growth leading to decreased success in school, decreased productivity, and increased poverty. Shared reading has been shown to enhance bonding between parent and child regardless of the age and has been shown to be strongly related to greater IQ, vocabulary, and success in school. Studies of NICU reading programs have demonstrated improved parent-child bonding and decreased parental stress. Staff/volunteers encouraging and modeling shared reading can imprint a behavior that parents may continue to practice beyond discharge, increasing bonding and developmental growth for years to come.

So when parents ask "What can I do to help my baby?" remember: Given the research, shared reading joins breastfeeding/pumping and skin-to-skin practice to create a NICU developmental trifecta that facilitates optimal functional outcomes!

How will this program be implemented?

Words Alive, a not-for-profit reading advocacy group has provided an initial donation of NEW books in both English and Spanish. These books have been covered in plastic lining and have stickers reminding users to wash hands before and after reading the books. These books are NOT for families to keep, but rather to use during their stay. Each baby admitted to the NICU will receive a green Wee Reads book bag (generously donated by SCANN and the Giraffe Club) that will be hung at bedside to store books either borrowed from unit or brought in by parents from home. Concierge will make rounds to ask visiting parents if they would like to choose some books to keep at bedside. Staff is also encouraged to get books for their babies as they are easily accessible, located in the drawers underneath the TV in the pumping room. Parents can be encouraged to bring in their own reading materials, whether a magazine or novel if they like, the point is to let the infant hear the sounds and cadence of the words!

Which infants can participate in this program?

As a patient in our NICU, ALL infants qualify for being read to. Use your clinical judgment in assessing an infant's stress signals/cues to determine if a reading activity is too over-stimulating for them. Infants can be read to even if they are too fragile to be held. Reading can be a perfect complement to a skin to skin session...or ask a concierge/cuddler to read to your infant if you are busy and the parents are not present.

Thank you for all the amazing work you do in promoting optimal development in our little ones! Any questions regarding the Wee Reads program, contact Erika Clemens OT or Janet Damstra RN

Wee Reads Guidelines for Staff:

- Volunteers/Parents to defer to the nurse to determine appropriateness to read to infant at any given time.
- Always read softly, decreasing the volume of your voice. A good rule of thumb is that although others in the room may hear you speaking, they will not be able to decipher your specific words.
- If an infant is stable is enough for skin-to-skin, an infant may be stable enough for reading.
- Take note of stress signals: mottling, vital instability, arching, arm salute/finger splay, grimacing, brow furrowing, hyper-alert or shut down state and stop reading activity if these signs are displayed.
- Parents and volunteers will be provided with education to identify infant stress signals and positive reactions.
- With young, fragile infants (e.g. A Nursery) that would not tolerate skin to skin, parents may softly read to while lying in isolette/radiant warmer. If these infants have few visitors, consider staff or volunteer reading to allow infant benefit of hearing cadence/sounds of voices.
- More stable infants (32 weeks and above) may be read to when alert, rested, and fed. After feeding when being held is the perfect time to read.