

# Supporting Fathers in the NICU

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UCLA Prevention Center of Excellence



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Public Partnership for Wellbeing

# Learning Objectives

1

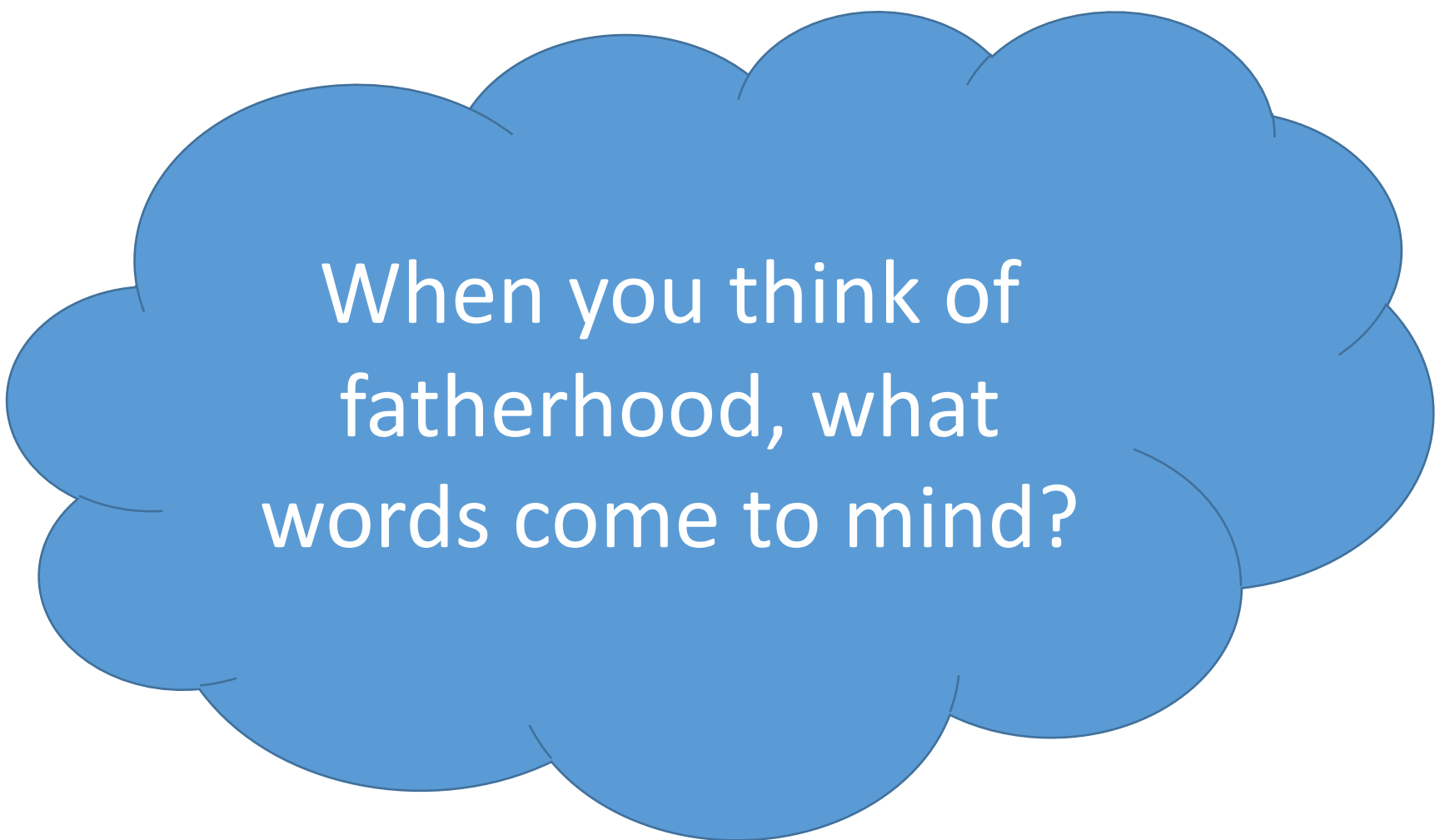
Describe societal expectations and external pressures placed on fathers.

2

Understand concrete ways one can provide support to dad.

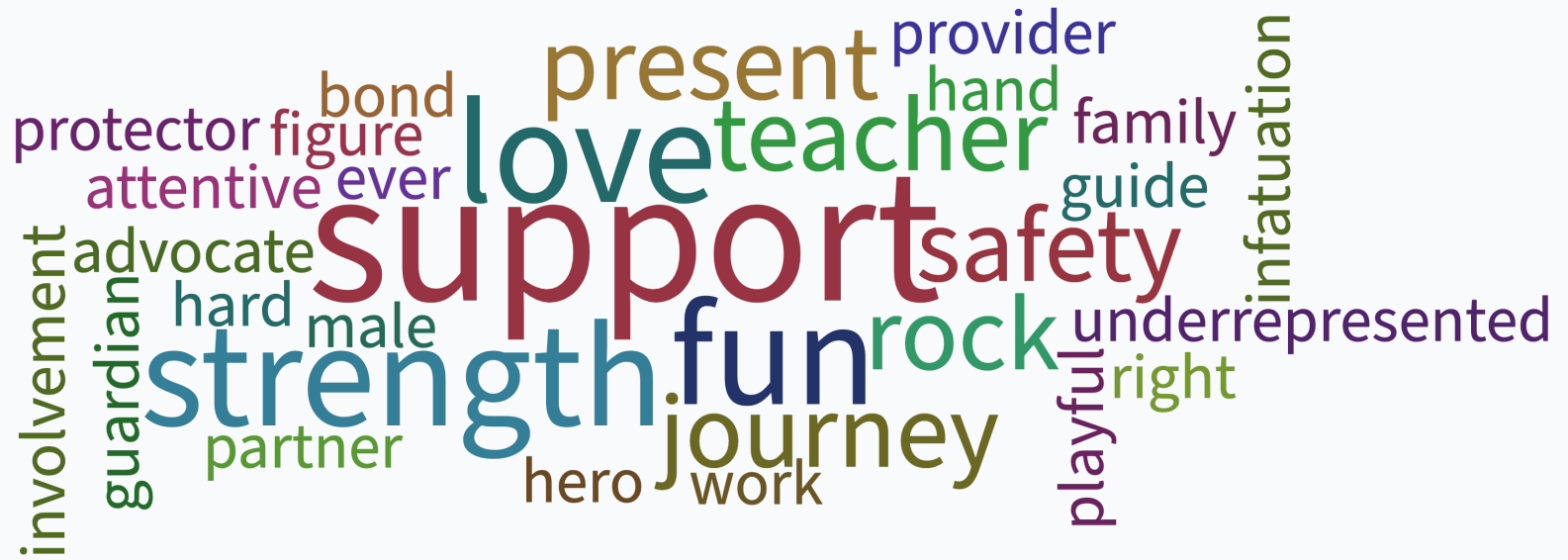
3

Identify three strategies for incorporating dad in baby's care.

A large, blue, cloud-shaped graphic with a white outline, centered on a white background. Inside the cloud, the text "When you think of fatherhood, what words come to mind?" is written in white, sans-serif font, arranged in four lines.

When you think of  
fatherhood, what  
words come to mind?

When you think of fatherhood, what words come to mind?



\*Word cloud created by participants in the audience during presentation

# Why Support Dads?

- Up to 1 in 3 dads experience postpartum depression
- Only 7% are diagnosed
- Rates are even higher in NICU dads, and dads are particularly vulnerable around the transition home

# Fathers and Society

Societal Expectations and Pressures Placed on Fathers

# Societal Expectations of Dad

Be the “strong one”

Always “fix it”

Don’t show emotions

Breadwinner

Uninvolved in childcare  
(Don’t want to be  
involved and/or isn’t  
good at childcare)

Take care of everyone  
else

Don’t need to be cared  
for

Don’t / Shouldn’t ask  
for help

# Learning More About and Supporting Fathers



# Identify Family Values and Structure

- What's important to the family?
- How do they view their roles?
- What was their plan for division of labor prior to birth?
- What are some feelings around parenthood for the family?

# Identify Barriers

- Work schedule?
- Other children needing care?
- Unsure how to be involved?
- Fear of doing something wrong?
- Emotional reactions to NICU experience/stay?

# Provide Education and Support

Share with dads that...

- Their mental health may be impacted
- Babies with involved dads do better
- Involved dads have better relationships
- Encourage practice, practice, practice!

# Ways Dads Can Be Involved

- Skin to skin contact, change diapers, participate in feeding (when possible), soothe infant
- Support partner with tasks
- Coordinate care at the hospital

# Supporting Dad

- Help them identify when they can recharge and take small breaks
- Provide resource on peer-to-peer mentor programs and/or support groups
- Encourage them to ask for help and identify people in their life they can lean on
- Share stressors with trusted others
- Advocate for needs at work, if applicable
- Provide resources for seeking couples or individual therapy

# Supporting Couple

- Check in with each other. “I know the focus has been on the baby, how are you holding up?”
- Acknowledge different experiences for each person
- Support both parents in carrying out activities (e.g., skin to skin, feeding, diaper changes)
- Find time to connect (“What has connecting with each other been like?”)

# Advocacy in the Hospital

- Encourage dad to communicate family needs with nurses and doctors.
  - “I would like to help with cares. What can I do?”
  - “I would like to prioritize my partner’s involvement at bedside when [xx activity] happens.”
- Ask for meetings with doctors and teams when you want clarification.

# Additional Guidance for Conversations with Dads

- Validate, validate, validate!
- Make room for questions.
- Normalize that many parents are unsure of how to do things (especially new dads!).
- Provide dad with concrete steps and skills he can develop.
- Cultivate a sense of hope and agency when possible.



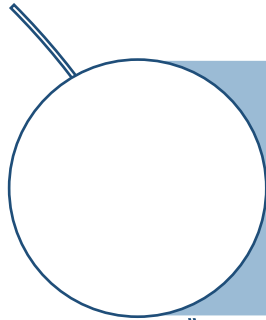
# Application of Strategies

Let's Practice!

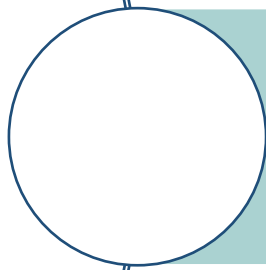
# Scenario

You meet with a mother, father, and their newborn, who was recently discharged from a 10-day NICU stay following a complicated birth and requiring cooling. This is their first child. Dad appears withdrawn, checking his phone often and avoiding eye contact with you. When you ask questions, he looks down or waits for his partner to answer instead.

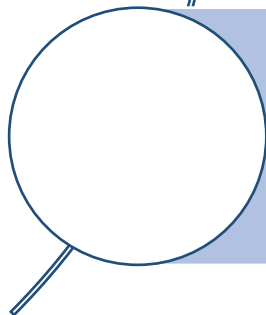
# Key Takeaways



**Be mindful** of societal expectations and external pressures on dad.



**Help identify** family values, barriers, and dad's own needs.



**Support involvement** in ways that feel fitting for dad and his family.

# Resources for Supporting Dads

# Continue your learning online!

For ongoing learning opportunities and access to a variety of resources, visit the Wellbeing4LA Learning Center at

[learn.wellbeing4la.org](https://learn.wellbeing4la.org)

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## < Educators Overcoming Under Stress

Explore strategies for supporting professional resilience and wellbeing, engaging students and families, and preparing for reopening in this series for educators.



My  
Learning

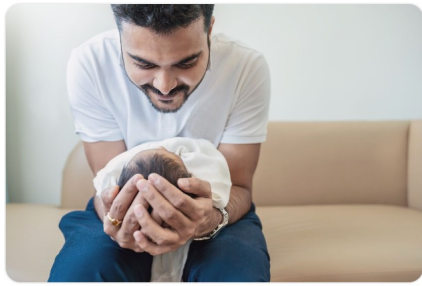
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## Supporting Dads in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU)

Parents with a baby in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) can feel pulled in multiple directions. Providers have the power to shape the experiences of NICU parents. This collection emphasizes ways to provide support to Dads through self-care and social support tips and resources.

📁 Resource Collection 🗃️ 4 items 🌐 English 📅 Added on 5/25/2022



## The Resilient NICU

In this course, some of the basic concepts of trauma and resilience informed care will be examined, with a focus on how to improve the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) experience for families and, in turn, improve infant health outcomes. Several situations that may be encountered in the NICU are explored and ways to help alleviate the impact of trauma for families, providers, and the people with whom we work are reviewed.

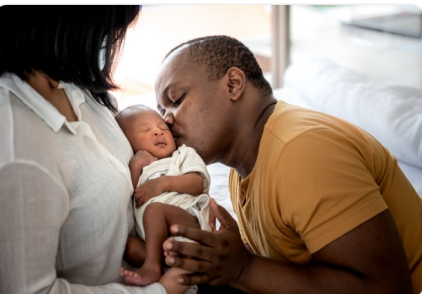
📺 Course ⌚ 1 hour 🌐 English 🎓 CE credit available 📅 Added on 11/11/2020



## "But what about Dad?" A Guide to Supporting Dads During the NICU Journey

Are you a provider interested in increasing the wellbeing and supporting the multiple responsibilities of new Dads of babies in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU)? This article is a quick and informative read that defines how providers can honor a NICU Dad's perspective and validate their experiences and challenges.

📄 Article 🌐 English 📅 Added on 5/25/2022



## Supporting Dads in the NICU: Tips for Partners

Many partners with babies in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) find it difficult to maintain the health of their relationship. This tool provides suggestions for partners on how to acknowledge, validate, communicate, and interact with NICU Dads during this challenging time.

📄 Printable Tool 🌐 English 📅 Added on 5/25/2022

## DMH + UCLA Early Childhood Fellowship



The DMH + UCLA Early Childhood Fellowship is designed to support the growth and wellbeing of professionals working with young children and families in Los Angeles County. For ten months, Fellows come together to learn, practice, and reflect on the application of key knowledge and skills that promote resilience in young children and their families. Fellows learn from **national and local experts** and collaborate with colleagues to create and implement innovative approaches to address the challenges faced by families with young children in their communities.

# Follow us on social media for more resources, tips, and events!



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# Resources

- **National Perinatal Association:**  
<https://www.nationalperinatal.org/resources>
- **Washington Fatherhood Council:**  
<https://wafatherhoodcouncil.org/>
- **Hand to Hold:** <https://handtohold.org/nicu-family-support/nicu-support-groups/>
- **NICU Dad:** <http://thenicudad.com/the-nicu-dad-resource-guide/>

Thank You!  
Questions? Comments?

Contact us at [abertone@mednet.ucla.edu](mailto:abertone@mednet.ucla.edu)  
and [alyssarm@usc.edu](mailto:alyssarm@usc.edu)