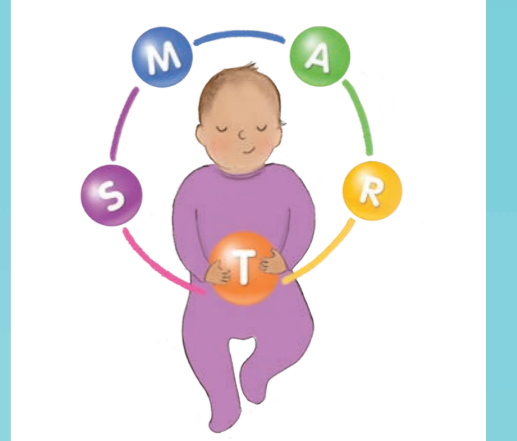


Supporting Early Intervention on the Neonatal Unit

Who are we? Ei Smart is a voluntary group of passionate clinicians, academics, researchers and parents working together with the sole aim of improving the developmental support available to babies and parents in the NICU and after discharge.

What is Ei SMART? This is a new approach dedicated to promoting and enhancing early development using the threads in EiSMART: Early Intervention – sensory (S), motor (M), attention and regulation (A), relationships (R), and together (T).

Who uses the EiSMART approach? This approach was developed with parents, initially for therapists, (Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists and Speech and Language Therapists) but we soon found everyone working with babies and young children in the NICU and beyond were interested and wanted to use it. Doctors, neonatal nurses and parents can integrate aspects of S,M,A and R into their everyday care of infants who were born early or have developmental challenges.



SENSORY S

Why is sensory development important?

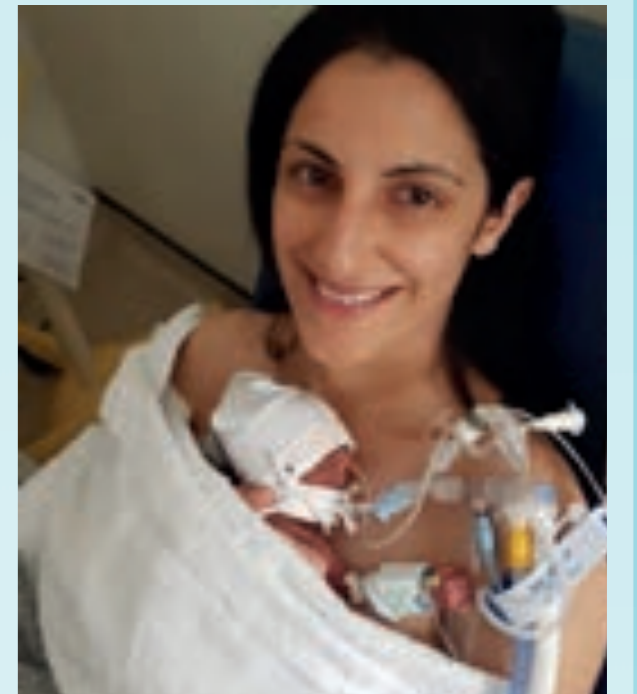
From birth babies use their senses to explore and move and to make sense of the world around them. Our sensory experiences can influence how we move and how we like to be touched, as well as being important for learning and attention too. The sensory environment of the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) is different to the sensory environment of the womb and so babies born prematurely or babies who are sick and need to be in the NICU have different sensory experiences. You might notice this makes these babies more sensitive and unsettled to some things such as light, noise, touch, being held and even interaction.

Ei SMART says:

Ei SMART says: We believe that it is essential to create a sensory environment which will support a baby’s growth and development and promotes parent- infant interaction as well as being a place for staff to work

Age appropriate sensory interventions which support development will be integrated into your baby’s care, whether in the NICU or in early intervention.

How do we enhance SENSORY development?



MOTOR M

Why is motor development important?

Motor development, sensory development and learning are all connected and progress in one area influences progress in other areas. Babies need to move and change position and they will usually move automatically as soon as they are able and this is a very important part of their development. Babies usually enjoy moving in lots of complicated ways and as they move they learn about their environment and this prompts them to move more.

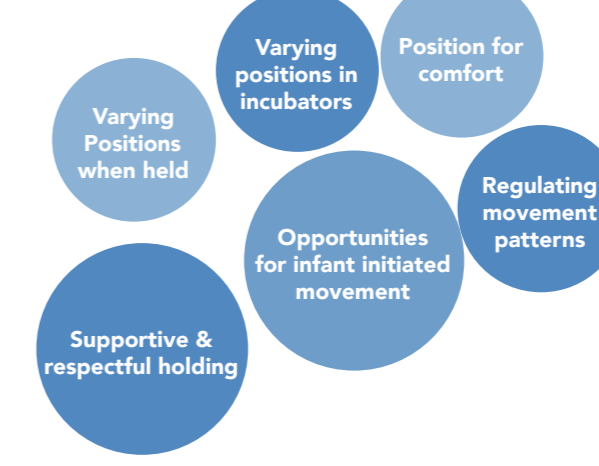
Ei SMART says:

On the neonatal unit it is important to consider the baby’s gestational age and observe their responses to movement and sensations. Very premature babies benefit from being swaddled and held in positions where they can bring their arms together as they would in the womb. This containment helps them feel ‘organised’ and prevents startles. Observe the baby’s responses to different movement experiences as those tell us what the baby likes and dislikes and which types of movement or experiences might be too challenging at that moment in time.

After discharge, babies are generally stronger and awake for longer periods, which allows for more variety in movement experiences such as being carried in a sling and being taken outside for a walk in the fresh air or having some awake tummy time on the changing mat on the floor.

We encourage the “just right challenge” so that the baby learns by being able to move within their environment and space but is also given any support which is needed to prevent startling or sudden movements.

How do we enhance MOTOR development?



ATTENTION & REGULATION A

Why is Attention and Regulation Development Important?

Attention and regulation in early development is important for interaction and learning as well as forming relationships. Regulation is the way we are able to regulate all of the systems in our body including breathing, temperature, how we respond to the environment and the people in it. This is something babies are doing from the minute they are born. In the early weeks and months of life, babies need help as they adjust to their new world. With help from their caregiver, who becomes their ‘go to person’, babies begin to develop their own abilities to regulate their responses to the world. Self regulatory behaviours support the successful development of emotional responses, attention and activity level, which in turn helps babies play and learn.

As a baby’s attention develops, it allows them to spend longer periods engaging in social interaction with parents and others in play. This is how babies learn about the world.

Ei SMART says:

Self regulation in early development is embedded in the child’s relationships with others. As babies learn that someone can help them make difficult feelings acceptable and manageable, they increasingly turn to their caregiver in times of need and this in turn promotes the start of self regulation. Some babies, including those who have spent time on the neonatal unit, may need extra help to develop their attention and regulation skills.

How can I help my baby?

Young babies communicate through their behaviour. This is their language. Watching and learning your baby’s cues can help you understand when and what type of help they need from you.

Some behaviours they may use to communicate include:

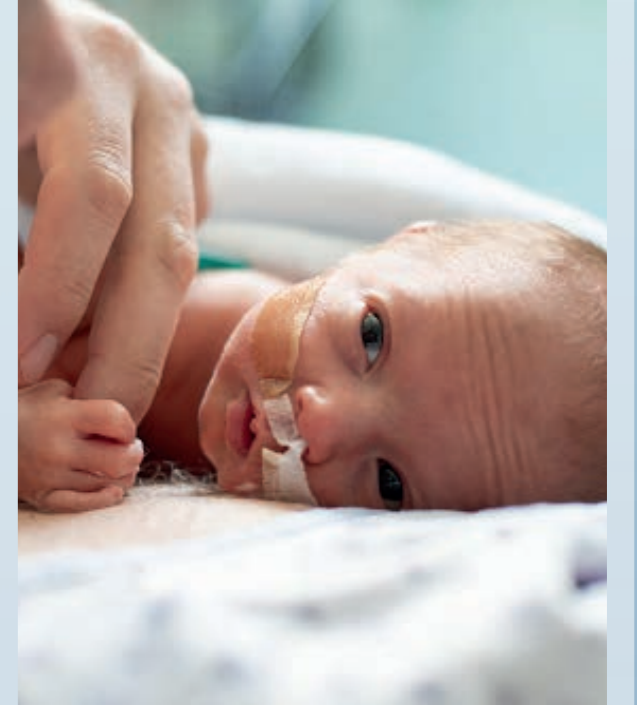
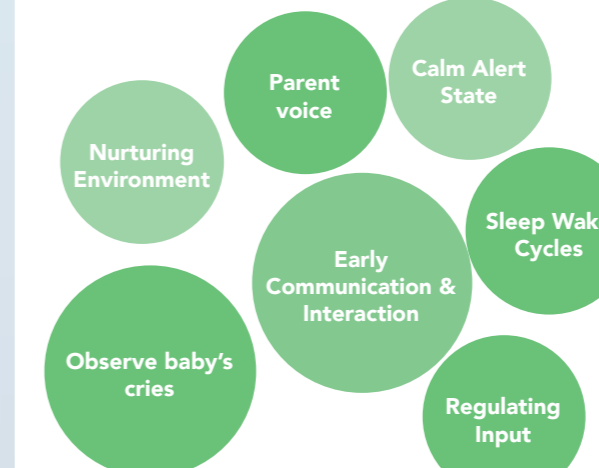
- Their colour may change
- They may start to move more (becoming wriggly) or less (floppy)
- They might get more fussy.
- They might start to get more drowsy or fall asleep.

Your baby will show they are ready for interaction what they are:

- In a quiet alert state.
- With a bright eyed look, seeming interested in what’s happening in their world.
- As your baby gets older they will spend more time in this alert state.

Spend time talking and reading with your baby everyday

How do we enhance ATTENTION & REGULATION development?



RELATIONSHIPS R

Relationships (R): Why are Relationships Important?

A secure attachment in a child’s first relationship lays the foundation for good relationships throughout life. Relationships are the framework for success and satisfaction in all domains of life. Our first experience of a close relationship is in our contact with our first caregivers and the quality of this connection will affect how we view future relationships. The parent-infant relationship is the core around which all other experience is structured. Interactions with the primary caregiver are particularly important because here is where the baby is paying very close attention, here is the baby’s ‘go to person’, the infant’s greatest potential source of comfort and reassurance.

Ei SMART says:

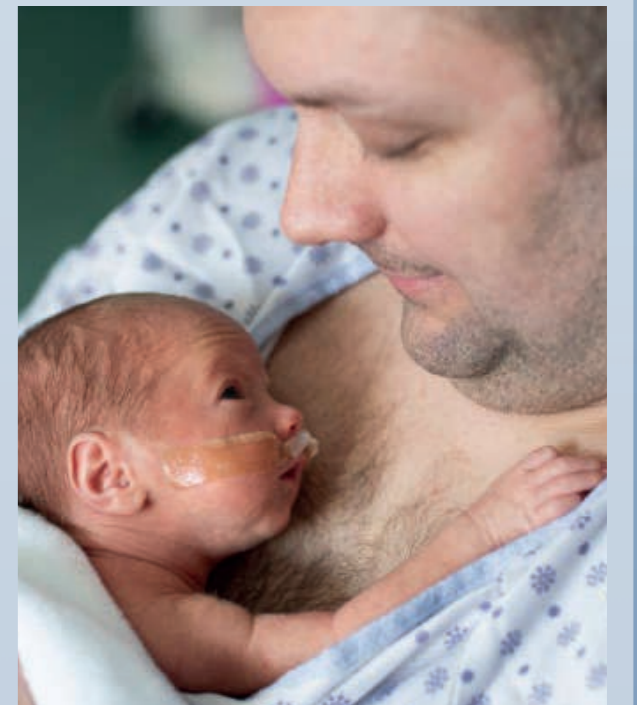
Supporting the attachment process for infants, parents and caregivers supports cognitive, communication, emotional and social development.

To thrive, babies and indeed all of us, need to feel close and connected. The way we interact with babies from birth builds their ability to respond and interact with their surroundings. Supporting parent – infant relationships is very important in the NICU where parents may experience great stress due to separation and worry. It is important to create a comforting and supporting experience for both parents and their babies.

Remember you cannot spoil a baby and don’t hold back on feeling joy with your infant!

Research shows that smiles help the brain grow.

How do we enhance RELATIONSHIP development?



TOGETHER T

Together, parents, therapists and health carers, seek to understand the lived experience of the infant and agree on interventions according to each child’s needs.

Mission

To lead and transform early intervention, so every infant with developmental challenges is supported using an Ei Smart approach, from birth for as long as support is needed.

Vision The global adoption of EiSmart as the way of supporting infants with developmental challenges from birth onwards.

Sensory, Motor, Attention and Regulation & Relationships form part of every interaction and intervention.

