

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 aim of improving the developmental support available to babies and parents, in the NICU and on going home.

What is Ei SMART? Ei SMART is a new approach dedicated to promoting and enhancing early development, emphasising the importance of the Ei SMART threads: **Early Intervention (Ei) – Sensory (S), Motor (M), Attention and regulation (A), Relationships (R), and Together (T).**

Who uses the Ei SMART approach? This approach was first developed, with parents, for therapists (Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists and Speech and Language Therapists) and everyone working with babies and young children in the NICU.

The framework of **S,M,A** and **R** is now used by therapists, doctors, neonatal nurses, and parents working together (**T**) to provide the best care to babies born early or with developmental or medical needs.



SENSORY **S** How do we enhance SENSORY development? 6 Top Tips:

- A nurturing sensory environment** for your baby might include reduced sounds, lowered lighting, and few strong odours
- Using your voice** to sing, speak softly, or shush gently can soothe and comfort your baby
- Skin-to-Skin (Kangaroo Care)** brings your baby close to your calming touch, your familiar smell, and your soothing sounds
- Giving your baby a finger to hold, giving “hand-hugs” and touching your baby with warm, cupped hands can calm and comfort your baby
- Feeding your baby in a calm environment provides comforting taste, smell, and touch
- Leaving small pieces of fabric that have been close to your skin (“**Scent Cloths**”) with your baby can calm and reassure them as they sleep



Please see the accompanying EiSMART Handout for more detailed information

MOTOR **M** How do we support MOTOR development? 6 Top Tips:

- Supporting your baby to bring their hands to the middle or to their face promotes a nice, relaxed posture and makes them feel calm and contained
- Moving gently and slowly when holding your baby, and avoiding sudden changes of direction, can prevent startles
- When moving your baby keep them close to your body using your hands and arms for containment and security
- Helping your baby to lie supported in **different lying positions** can build strength and skills
- Swaddling** your baby when they are resting can prevent startles and provides calming support
- Giving your baby **opportunities to move freely** when they are awake and calm can be enjoyable for some babies



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ATTENTION & REGULATION **A** How do we support ATTENTION and REGULATION? 6 TOP TIPS:

- Supporting your baby’s sleep** conserves their energy and supports attention and regulation
- Watching your baby will reveal whether they are ready to interact or if they are tired or overwhelmed
- Learn what your baby’s behaviours mean – we call these behavioural cues, so that you can respond in the best way possible
- Sucking on a pacifier (dummy/soother) or on their own hands, while being in a **supported position** can help your baby maintain calm attention
- Talking, singing, and reading** with your baby supports early communication and learning
- When your baby is alert and making eye contact, using your voice and facial expressions will reassure and encourage interaction



Please see the accompanying EiSMART Handout for more detailed information

RELATIONSHIPS **R** How do we help the development of RELATIONSHIPS? 6 Top Tips:

- Getting to know your individual baby’s **likes and dislikes** and responding to their needs, can promote secure attachment
- Involve siblings** by sharing scent cloths, sending messages home and back to baby, and sharing pictures, video calls, and stories
- Copying your baby’s **facial expressions** and sounds can help to create a strong bond
- Skin-to-Skin (Kangaroo Care) can help mothers, fathers, and siblings bond with their new family member
- Holding your baby** and being physically close strengthens your connection
- Hearing your voice, smelling your scent, and sensing your familiar touch gives calming **reassurance that you are near**



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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.

