

NICU Parent Support Audio Cast



Audio Messages of Information, Encouragement & Support for NICU Parents

With Your Host: Dr. Kirsti A. Dyer

Episode 3 - Searching for Answers to the Difficult Questions

[Brief Music Interlude - 15 seconds. Good Night My Angel.]

Welcome

Welcome. You have accessed the NICU Parent Support Audio & Podcast Channel. This is a series of audio messages of encouragement and support for parents and families who have babies in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit or the Intensive Care Nursery.

I am your host for this series of audio messages. My name is Dr. Kirsti Dyer.

I am a physician, professional health educator, professor, teacher, grief, loss & bereavement expert and author. I also happened to be a former NICU Parent.

[Brief Music Interlude - 15 seconds. Good Night My Angel.]

Introduction

Today's episode considers searching for answers to some of the difficult questions facing NICU Parents, the "Why Me's" the "What If's" and the "If Only's." We will also look at the "Unanswerable Why's" and a bit more at the "What If's." The episode concludes considering one of the most difficult question that you may be thinking, "How do we go on living after a NICU experience?"

So let's get started.

The "Why Me's" "What If's" and "If Only's"

For Parents, having their newborn admitted to the Neonatal Intensive Care can leave them struggling to make sense of it all and asking all kinds of questions. Parents wonder "Why Me?" "What if I hadn't..." and "If only we had...?" The list of questions goes on and on as NICU Parents search for meaning in the experience and try to find some sense of hope in what may appear to be a hopeless situation.

The Unanswerable "Why's?"

In my profession, Medicine, we are faced with so many unanswerable "Why's?" I have had to accept with many patients that there are times we cannot find an answer to this question.

When faced with the unanswerable "Why" in the past, I have found the thoughts of Rabbi Earl Grollman on this topic to be very helpful in coping with this most difficult question. Rabbi Grollman's thoughts have been slightly modified to reflect the NICU situation. He says:

"Why must life be one of sorrow?" "Why?" There are no pat answers. No one completely understands the mysteries of life. Even if the question were answered, would your pain be eased?

There is no satisfactory response for an unresolvable dilemma. Not all questions have complete answers. "Unanswered Why's" are a part of life. The search may continue, but the real question might be "How [do I] pick up the pieces and go on living as meaningful as possible?"

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[Brief Music Interlude - 27.5 seconds. Good Night My Angel.]

Answering the “What If’s”

Deborah Davis and Mara Stein, authors of *Parenting Your Premature Baby and Child*, write more about the “What If’s.” They take a look at the many questions parent have while trying to make difficult decisions about their newborn. They write:

Imagining the “What if’s” is a normal part of coming to terms with your decisions. Having doubts is a natural reaction to making such difficult, painful decisions. As you deal with your feelings, particularly your anger and guilt, and as you come to terms with your baby’s difficult life and/or death, you will eventually notice a subtle shift in your attitude towards your decisions. You will come to accept reality—it happened, you made a decision, you can live with it—instead of fighting it.

Lingering “What if’s” become reflective day dreams rather than attempts to change reality. The “What if’s” may become gentler and broader: “If only he hadn’t been born so prematurely” rather than “If only I had made different choices.” In time, you will be able to let go of what might have been and accept what is.

Instead of trying to second guess, “What If I’d made a different decision?” most parents, in time, learn to accept that they made the best decision under very difficult circumstances. They do not spend a lifetime worrying about what might have happened if they had made a different choice.

[Brief Music Interlude - 22 seconds. Good Night My Angel.]

Struggling to Answer Our “Why?”

Perhaps the most difficult part of our NICU experience was never finding a medical answer to the question “Why?” our daughter was admitted.

It didn’t take too long before we realized that to keep asking “Why” would only be unsettling, disruptive, upsetting and even counter-productive. A quotes from an unknown author reminds us that in difficult situations

*We have no right to ask when sorrow comes, “Why did this happen to me?”
unless we ask the same question for every moment of happiness that comes our way.*

Letting go of the “Why’s” can be extremely beneficial to incorporating the challenge into our lives and restoring peace after facing a life crisis.

Focusing on “How do we go on living?”

My husband and I purposefully did not spend much time dwelling on the “Why’s?” of my daughter’s NICU diagnosis especially when it became apparent that there would be no clear answer for her condition. Instead we chose to focus on the more answerable question “How do we go on living as meaningful a life as possible, now that our lives have been forever changed by this experience?”

It is human nature to want to answer the question “Why?” yet, when it may be difficult, if not impossible, to find an answer, sometimes it may be better to shift focus and let it go or at least let it be.

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Reminder of the Questions to Let Go, or Let Be

Letting go of the “Why Me’s” “What If’s” and “If Only’s” or just letting of all of these question be can be extremely beneficial in helping parents cope during and after a NICU Experience. Letting these difficult questions be, helps you to more readily incorporate the changes into your life, restore peace and let you focus your energies on what is most important--helping your baby to heal.

One of my favorite quotes comes from another unknown author who reminds us that there are:

Three phrases that I should let go from my mind, if I want to be serene are

“What if?” “If only...” and “Why Me?”

This quote bears repeating so hopefully you can remember the three phrases that you should let go from your mind, if you want to be serene:

“What if?” “If only...” and “Why Me?”

[Brief Music Interlude - 21 seconds. Good Night My Angel.]

Thank You

Thank you for listening to the information in this episode from the NICU Parent Support Audio & Podcast channel our series of audio messages of encouragement and support for NICU Parents.

Please Visit the NICU Parent Support Site and Blog

I would like to invite you to visit the NICU Parent Support site at NICUParentSupport.org and the NICU Parent Support Blog at nicuparentsupport.blogspot.com. Some of the information for these audio episodes has been taken from articles and blog entries on these sites.

I hope that you will find this series of audio messages to be informative, encouraging, comforting and supportive to you during your time in the NICU.

Until the next time, I wish you strength for getting through your NICU experience.

Resources Used for this Podcast:

Dyer K. Observing Mother’s Day with Renewed Appreciation. Journey of Hearts. 2002. Available at: <http://www.journeyofhearts.org/resources/momday.html>

Grollman RA. Why? Journeys Newsletter. Washington D.C.: Hospice Foundation of America, March 2001, p. 3.

Davis DL. Stein MA. Parenting Your Premature Baby and Child: The Emotional Journey. Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing. 2004, p. 353.

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Music Source: Good Night My Angel. Billy Joel, 1993. River of Dreams.
Hummed by Dr. Dyer.



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