Helping big brothers and sisters of preemies

**Before they see baby for the first time**

* Use photos or recordings you have to show them baby. Tell them about baby and describe the noises/equipment/people in the unit
* Tell them that they will really help baby by washing hands when they visit
* They could choose a photo of themselves or the family to bring in
* Bring in a small and quiet activity for your child for the visit

**Help them adjust to new circumstances**

Having a premature baby effects the whole family and it can be hard for siblings to understand what’s going on - they can make up their own reasons why baby has come early – so it’s really important to talk with them about what’s happening. It is not uncommon for Children’s behaviour to return to behaviours from when they were younger e.g. bedwetting, carrying a security blanket or toy, thumb sucking. These behaviours may be comforting and familiar to them at a time when everything else seems chaos.

* Give simple and honest updates, appropriate to age and understanding
* Don’t avoid answering questions – they may imagine the worst if you do
* mark the days off on a calendar together until baby does come home
* Leave messages for big brother or sister on baby’s cot
* Talk about the visit after you leave the unit
* Look through siblings own baby photos with them – what is the same/different?
* Set aside time for bedtime stories, visiting the park, etc with sibling
* As much as possible, stick to familiar routines e.g. playgroup, visiting friends etc
* Inform child’s playgroup/ nursery/school of circumstances

**Help them to become involved**

* For smaller children, small, practical jobs help them feel involved – eg making sure there are enough nappies or cotton wool, helping pick out a vest or baby grow, etc
* Encourage sibling to talk to or touch baby (if old enough could read/record stories)
* They can draw postcard size pictures to bring in for baby
* Make a scrapbook together, with photos/nappies/foot/handprints etc that can be taken into Nursery or School

 