

# Sibling Sunday Visitation at a Neonatal Intensive Care Nursery

Minga, A. RN BSN, Thomson, C. RNC BSN, & Moore, B. RNC-NIC DNP  
University of South Alabama Children's & Women's Hospital

## Introduction

When babies are expected, parents, grandparents, and siblings look forward to the birth of the new family member. When the infant is born prematurely or is sick at birth and has to receive care in the neonatal intensive care nursery (NICU), there is often confusion for the sibling who was expecting to have a baby at home.

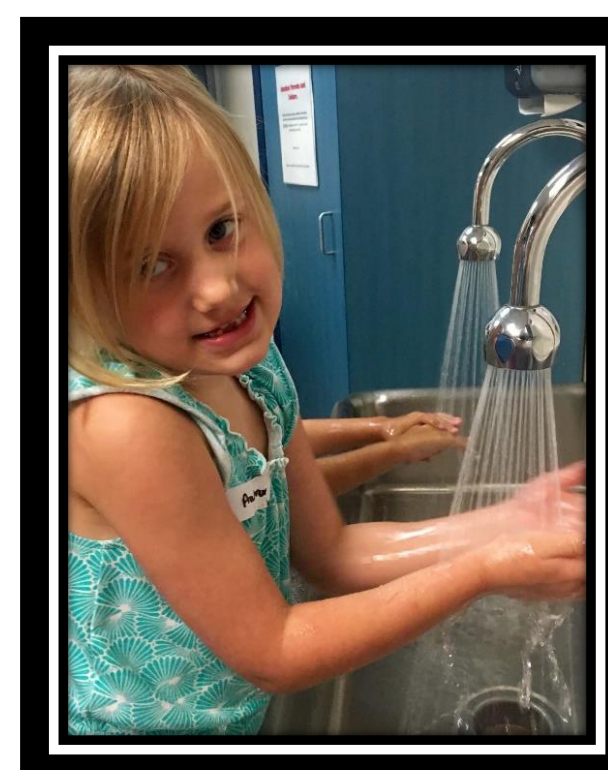
A level III NICU has implemented a program for siblings to "visit" with their new baby brother or sister and better understand where they are and feel closer to the new family addition without putting the immunocompromised patient at risk (Peluso et al., 2015). Once a month, on a Sunday, siblings are invited to come have ice cream sundaes and learn about the NICU at an age appropriate level. Activities include handwashing, making pictures for their sibling and learning about some of the equipment and professionals in the NICU. After a brief orientation to the NICU environment, the siblings are allowed to "visit" the baby through a robot that travels to the patient's bedside. Parents may be at the baby's bedside so the children understand this is the expected baby. Parents facilitate the live interaction by holding or touching the infant. Two nurses help to facilitate the experience...one at the bedside and one with the sibling (outside the unit). Discussion from the classroom is supported through demonstration of concepts discussed. For example, the baby's orogastric tube may be identified by the nurse at the bedside which reinforces information shared with the sibling in the classroom. Another example would be the demonstration of respiratory equipment (ventilators, nasal cannulas, etc...).



Through the use of technology, first "family photos" were taken in the NICU as these big brothers got to see their siblings for the first time.

## Objectives

The objectives of this program were to provide the sibling an introduction to the NICU environment and decrease the "unknown" of the NICU by providing a "tour" using a mobile robot. The siblings learn about the importance of handwashing and "visit" with their sibling through the use of the robot and an electronic tablet device.



The importance of handwashing when visiting with their new sibling is emphasized in the program.



## Methods

Siblings are taught about the NICU environment through an educational session "topped" with a sundae treat! They see actual equipment used in the NICU and get to color pictures of common scenes in the NICU. The siblings are taught how to wash their hands and told why it is important to wash their hands when around their new sibling. Germ glow lotion and a black light are used to demonstrate to the students what is on their hands that they cannot see. Siblings are also taught the importance of changing their clothes when they come in after school or after playing outside.

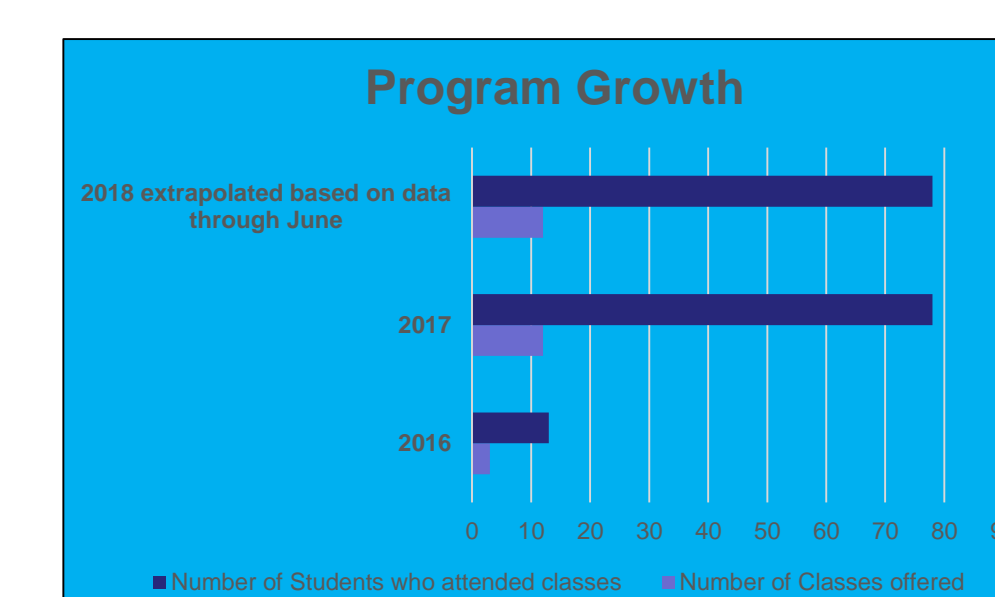
A doll the size of a premature baby is held by the siblings. They learn how to be gentle with the infant while supporting their neck. The equipment shared in the classroom is age appropriate. The preferred age for siblings is four years and above, however, younger siblings have been allowed to participate with staff adjusting the explanations at an appropriate cognitive level (Anthony, 2017). As some of the younger infants may be fascinated with the small bottle and nipple used, the older siblings may be introduced to the endotracheal tube and other advanced equipment. They practice holding a preemie doll while paying close attention to protecting the head/neck of the infant.

A video is also shared with the siblings. It is a young child who was premature who narrates a visit to the NICU to explain the equipment and processes he experienced.

The experience includes a "bedside" visit with their sibling through the use of a "robot" that goes to the patient's bedside and sends real-time video to the sibling and they can talk to the baby. The robot is a mobile stand with a dedicated electronic tablet attached. The siblings get to "drive" the video to the baby's bedside as a RN in the unit assures the safe delivery of the video device and serves to assure the visit is enjoyable for the sibling and parent attending.

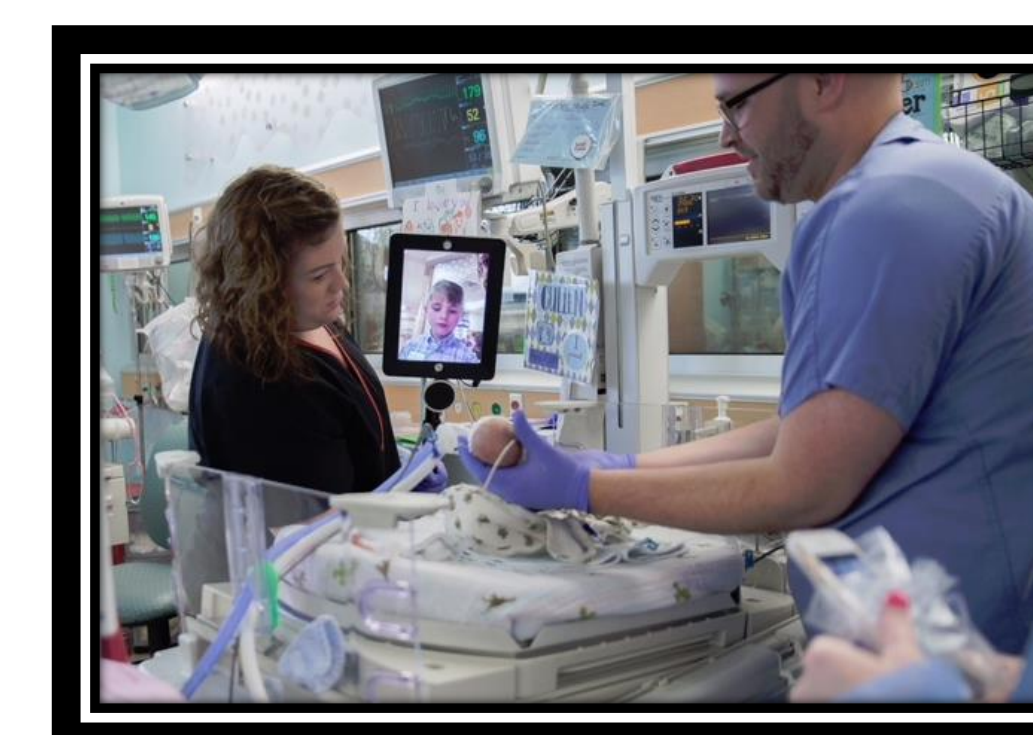
## Results

The visitation program for siblings of NICU patients has grown since 2016. In 2016, three classes were offered with a total of 13 children attending. In 2017, one class per month was offered, with a total of 78 children attending. Through June of 2018, there has been a class a month and 36 children have attended the Sibling Sunday event.



There have been revisions to the program since its inception. The classroom location has been moved closer to the NICU. Also, a coloring activity (using NICU centric coloring sheets) in the NICU waiting room keeps the siblings busy as they wait for "their turn" with the robot. The pictures provide an added opportunity for the siblings to learn more about the NICU environment.

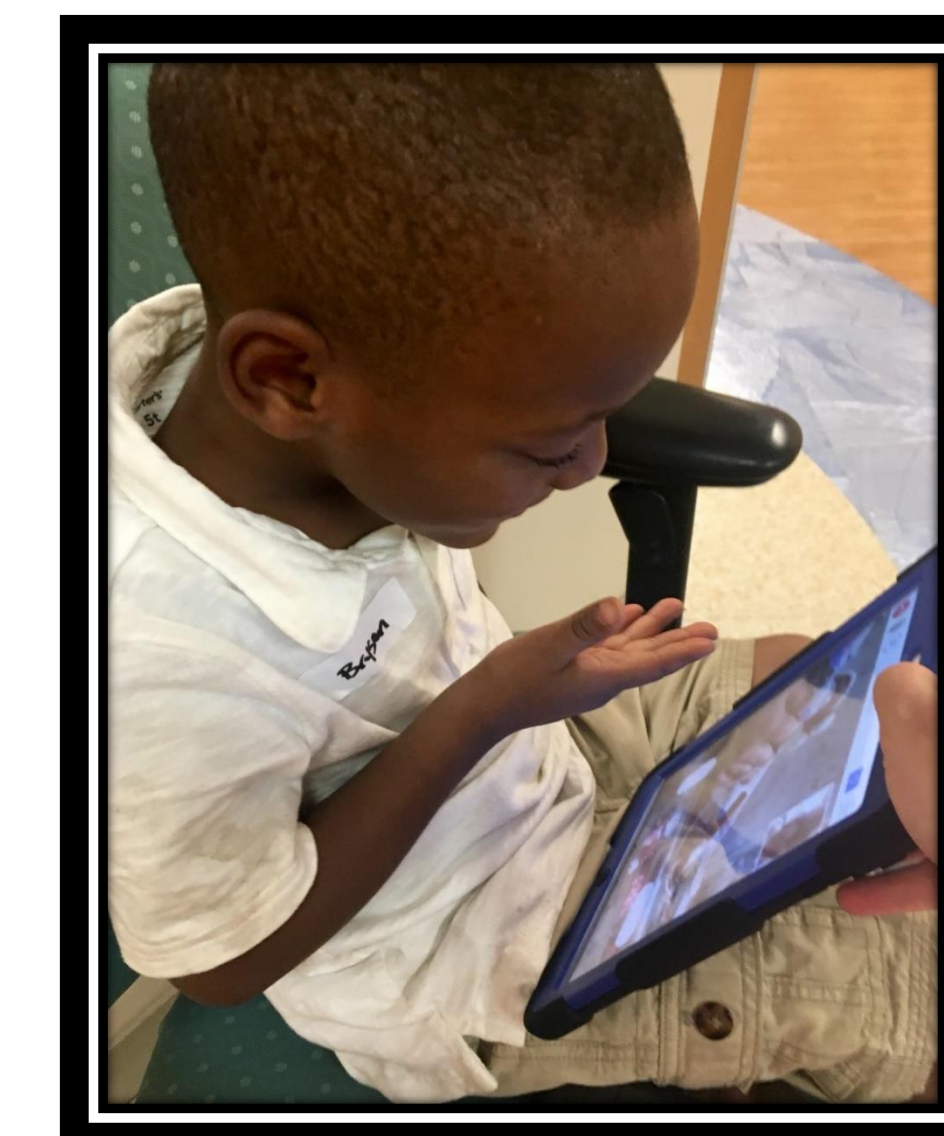
Siblings of all ages have enjoyed the experience. Preschool through preteen siblings are excited to see their new family member. In addition to visitation, the class offers an opportunity for the siblings to openly ask questions and share their feelings about their sibling's hospitalization (Levick et al., 2010).



There have been requests for children in the extended family (non-siblings) to attend the sessions. Due to the popularity of the program, only siblings are currently allowed to attend the sessions.

The use of a video "robot" has helped make the program a success. Not only do the siblings get to learn about the NICU, but they also get to interact with their sibling in real time. This helps to reinforce the existence and status of their sibling.

Parents have provided positive feedback regarding the program. At the time of this presentation, the program has been in place for over two years. One parent shared that after the class, she can definitely tell a difference in her child washing his hands, even at home after using the restroom. Education about handwashing may have long-term effects on infection prevention in the home after the preterm infant goes home.



## Conclusions

Infection control and safety of the NICU environment can be preserved while addressing the needs of the sibling of the patient. The developed Sunday Visitation Program is a positive alternative to direct sibling visitation during periods of increased infection risk, such as RSV (respiratory syncytial virus) and flu. Children under 18 years of age who participate in the "visitation" do so without putting the NICU patients at risk.

There have been requests from the parents of the NICU patients for more frequent opportunities for visitation by the "robot" for the siblings. The main barrier to increasing the number of visitation days/classes is personnel availability. Two nurses currently coordinate the course and one works with the siblings in the hall outside of the NICU to "drive" the robot and the second nurse is inside the NICU to be sure the robot goes to the correct bed. Logistics to offer additional courses are being considered.

Another issue of concern is once the class is in session, parents with other children at the hospital are asking to "add on" to the course (having their children attend a session without registering ahead of time). The time required to work with the children makes it difficult to add additional children who did not hear the introductory sessions in the classroom before the class started.

Going forward, there is a desire to offer the visitation days more than once a month. The team has recently incorporated the help of volunteers to help during the coloring activity. This addition of personnel helps the NICU RNs focus on the bedside and working with the sibling "moving" the robot.

### References

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