

# Tip Sheet: Supporting A Parent To Say Goodbye

Leaving hospital without one's baby is traumatic. In NSW Hospitals there are no standard protocols around this, so practices differ across the State. The following are some good practice guidelines developed by the IDRS Parents Project based on first-hand experience:

- Discharge of a newborn assumed into care needs to be done with respect and sensitivity. Whatever one's views about the birth parent's capacity, it is important to respect the loss and grief the parent is experiencing. Leaving the hospital without their baby, will remain with the parents and have implications for their mental health.
- Parents should be forewarned about when their baby is to be discharged. Whenever possible they should know the day before.
- Meet with the parents and discuss the discharge plan.
- Take some photos of the parents with the baby. Print these photos and place them in a memory book to give the parent the next day. The parents may also like a hand or foot print of their baby.
- Some parents may request to have their baby christened by the hospital chaplain.
- If there are no safety or health issues immediate family should be provided with the opportunity to visit the baby, take photos and/or participate in the christening or naming ceremony.
- If the mother is to be discharged at the same time as the baby ensure that she has been given information and understands what to do about milk flow and post discharge health advice.
- On the day of discharge the parents should be allowed to bath and dress the baby in an outfit they have chosen. Some hospitals will allow the mother to keep the baby's hospital nightie as it carries the baby's scent.
- In NSW all babies receive a Blue Book recording health checks and developmental milestones. The Blue Book is of emotional significance to the relinquishing parents – it is their proof their baby exists. Handing this book over is often very distressing for the relinquishing parents. In such cases, if possible, two Blue Books should be created with the original copy going with the baby and a photocopy given to the birth parents. Similarly duplicates of the crib card and ankle ID bracelets should be provided.
- Community Services should provide a time they are coming to collect the baby, so there are no traumatic scenes and the need for security staff. It is best for parents to say goodbye to their baby and leave the hospital one hour before this happens.
- As the time to leave draws close, inform the parents of how long they have (for example 15 minutes) and encourage them to say their goodbyes. If there are no safety concerns the parents should be allowed to take their baby to a quiet room and have some privacy.
- When it is time, encourage the parents to say a final goodbye and leave the hospital with their support person.
- Parents Community Services should be contacted to say the baby is ready to leave the hospital.

*Justice • Respect • Persistence*