smooth way home®

southwest human development

Creating a Positive Future for Young Children



PARENT HANDBOOK

TRANSITIONING FROM SMOOTH WAY HOME SERVICES

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Welcome Message



Thank you for participating in the Smooth Way Home program. We hope that your transition from NICU to home has been supported by care, connection, and the resources you need as you and your baby begin this new chapter together. This parent handbook provides an Occupational Therapy-informed resource guide to be utilized following discharge from the program.

Purpose of the Handbook

Inside this guide, you will find information about establishing routines, feeding, understanding your baby's cues, supporting development through everyday activities, caregiver well-being, community resources, and more. Our goal is to help you recognize that the everyday moments you share with your baby such as feeding, bathing, playing, cuddling, and caring for one another are meaningful opportunities for connection, learning, and growth. Remember, you do not have to navigate this journey alone. Asking questions, seeking support, and celebrating small successes are all important parts of your family's journey home.

smooth way home®

Certificate of Completion

Presented to

_____

[Baby's Name]

And

_____

[Parent/Caregiver's Name]

In recognition of completing the Smooth Way Home Program!

Date: _____

Fragile Infant Specialist: _____

At First Glance-Quick Reference Guide

Who Do I Call First?

- Call 9-1-1 for an emergency or if your baby needs immediate medical attention.
- If you are unsure whether your baby's symptoms are an emergency, follow the emergency instructions provided by your baby's healthcare team.
- Call 877-705-KIDS (5437) for free child development support.
- Ask your pediatrician or healthcare team if you have concerns about your baby's development or would like additional developmental support.
- Reach out to your child's healthcare team or a mental health professional if you are feeling overwhelmed, stressed, anxious, or need additional support.

Developmental Milestones

Browse these resources to learn more about your child's developmental milestones:

- **Zero to Three**: Information around development and parenting
- **Pathways**: Parenting resources on early childhood development
- **Center for Disease Control**: List of developmental milestones by month
- **American Academy of Pediatrics:** Developmental Milestones from birth to age 5
- Track your child's developmental milestones from age 9mos-2 years **here**

Self-Care Tips

- If you are overcome with thoughts, take time to rest and focus on your breathing
- Remember that these moments go by quickly- celebrate small wins
- You know your baby better than anyone, it's okay to ask questions or ask for help
- View Postpartum Anxiety Mindfulness Exercises **here**
- **Postpartum Helplines:**
  - National Maternal Mental Health Hotline: Call or text 1-833-TLC-MAMA
  - Arizona Warm Line: Call 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
  - Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: Call or text 988

Occupations and Co-occupations

What Is An Occupation?

Occupation can be defined as an activity someone does everyday that gives their life meaning and purpose (AOTA, 2020). Categories of occupations are listed in the Occupational Therapy Practice Framework (OTPF), such as activities of daily living, instrumental activities of daily living, health management, rest and sleep, education, work, play, leisure, and social participation (AOTA, 2020).

What Is A Co-occupation?

Co-occupations can be defined as meaningful activities that often involve two or more people participating together (AOTA, 2020). Co-occupations are typically the most interactive of social occupations. Some examples of co-occupations include going on a walk together or cooking a meal with someone. A very important co-occupation is caregiving, which involves shared participation between the caregiver and infant, creating opportunities for interaction, connection, and development.



Your Baby's Occupations

Your baby is participating in so many occupations already!

- Eating
  - Breastfeeding or bottle feeding
  - Beginning to explore solid food options
- Rest and sleep
  - Napping, sleeping through the night
  - Participating in self-soothing techniques
- Play
  - Exploring toys, reaching and grasping
  - Participating in tummy-time
  - Exploring different textures and sounds
- Social Participation
  - Making eye contact with parents or caregivers
  - Smiling and laughing with others
  - Vocalizing and babbling

Your Baby's Co-occupations

Because babies are still growing and learning from the world around them, they often need external support from their parents or caregivers to complete other occupations. These shared activities can be considered co-occupations, as both the infant and caregiver actively participate and influence one another's experience. Caregivers help babies engage in activities such as:

- Feeding, bathing, dressing, diapering
- Soothing/comforting
- Playing together, reading together, singing together
- Tummy time, skin-to-skin contact
- Exploring toys together
- Social interaction (eye contact, smiling, talking, babbling)
- Participating in family activities

Routine Building At Home

The Importance of Routines

Building routines after a NICU stay is important because it helps families adjust to caring for their infant at home, develop caregiver confidence, and create predictable opportunities for bonding and development. Looking at this from an Occupational Therapy perspective, routines support both the infant's participation in everyday activities and the caregiver's ability to feel comfortable in their new role.

The transition from hospital to home is a very crucial step in your child's life, setting up effective home routines for your family will set your baby up for success.

1. Supporting infant regulation and development

Predictable, responsive routines help infants become familiar with daily activities while helping caregivers recognize their cues and support comfort and regulation.

2. Building caregiver confidence and self-efficacy

Transitioning home after the NICU can feel overwhelming. Establishing manageable routines helps caregivers learn their infant's needs, practice daily care, and build confidence.

3. Strengthening parent-infant bonding and co-occupations

Routines create opportunities for bonding through shared activities like feeding, dressing, soothing, and playing. These co-occupations help recognize their infant's cues and strengthen connection.

4. Supporting caregiver well-being and occupational balance

Flexible routines help caregivers balance daily responsibilities, relationships, rest, and self-care after NICU discharge.

5. Promoting participation in everyday life

Routines help families support development through everyday activities, such as talking during dressing or incorporating supervised floor play into the day.

Developmental Milestones (9 mos-2 years)

This section of the handbook includes information on early childhood developmental milestones ranging from 2 months old to 2 years. Each page details age-appropriate social/emotional, language/communication, cognitive, and movement/physical development milestones. Because every child develops at their own pace, milestones should be used as general guidelines rather than strict expectations.

The Importance of Understanding Your Child's Development

Knowing about developmental milestones can help you:

- Celebrate your baby's new skills and progress.
- Learn ways to support your baby's development through everyday activities.
- Recognize your baby's strengths and interests.
- Notice when you may have questions or concerns about your baby's development.
- Share observations and concerns with your baby's healthcare team.



How To Calculate Your Baby's Adjusted Age

Please remember that the developmental milestones listed below are based on a baby's **adjusted age**.

Adjusted age takes into account how early a baby was born and is typically used when looking at developmental milestones for babies who were born prematurely.



Adjusted Age = Chronological Age − How Many Weeks Early Baby Was Born

Example:

If your baby is 6 months old (24 weeks) but was born 8 weeks early: **24 weeks − 8 weeks = 16 weeks**

Adjusted age would be approximately 16 weeks, or 4 months.

_____ - _____ = _____

Chronological Age | How many weeks early | Adjusted age

Utilize your baby's adjusted age through the first 2 years of life. Remember to utilize this number when analyzing your child's developmental milestones in the next pages!

Use this **online adjusted age calculator** if needed.

9 Month Milestones

Social/Emotional Milestones

- [ ] Is shy, clingy, or fearful around strangers
- [ ] Shows several facial expressions, like happy, sad, angry, and surprised
- [ ] Looks when you call his/her name
- [ ] Reacts when you leave (looks, reaches for you, or cries)
- [ ] Smiles or laughs when you play peek-a-boo

Language/Communication Milestones

- [ ] Makes a lot of different sounds like “mamamama” and “babababababa”
- [ ] Lifts arms up to be picked up

Cognitive Milestones

- [ ] Looks for objects when dropped out of sight (like his spoon or toy)
- [ ] Bangs two things together

Movement/Physical Dev Milestones

- [ ] Gets to a sitting position by herself
- [ ] Moves things from one hand to her other hand
- [ ] Uses fingers to “rake” food towards himself
- [ ] Sits without support

12 Month (1 Year) Milestones

Social/Emotional Milestones

- [ ] Plays games with you, like pat-a-cake

Language/Communication Milestones

- [ ] Waves “bye-bye”
- [ ] Calls a parent “mama” or “dada” or another special name
- [ ] Understands “no” (pauses briefly or stops when you say it)

Cognitive Milestones

- [ ] Puts something in a container, like a block in a cup
- [ ] Looks for things he sees you hide, like a toy under a blanket

---

Movement/Physical Dev Milestones

- [ ] Pulls up to stand
- [ ] Walks, holding on to furniture
- [ ] Drinks from a cup without a lid, as you hold it
- [ ] Picks things up between thumb and pointer finger, like small bits of food

15 Month Milestones

Social/Emotional Milestones

- [ ] Copies other children while playing, like taking toys out of a container when another child does
- [ ] Shows you an object she likes
- [ ] Claps when excited
- [ ] Hugs stuffed doll or other toy
- [ ] Shows you affection (hugs, cuddles, or kisses you)

Language/Communication Milestones

- [ ] Tries to say one or two words besides “mama” or “dada,” like “ba” for ball or “da” for dog
- [ ] Looks at a familiar object when you name it
- [ ] Follows directions given with both a gesture and words (gives a toy when you hold out your hand and say, “Give me the toy.”)
- [ ] Points to ask for something or to get help

Cognitive Milestones

- [ ] Tries to use things the right way, like a phone, cup, or book
- [ ] Stacks at least two small objects, like blocks

Movement/Physical Dev Milestones

- [ ] Takes a few steps on his own
- [ ] Uses fingers to feed herself some food

18 Month Milestones

Social/Emotional Milestones

- [ ] Moves away from you, but looks to make sure you are close by
- [ ] Points to show you something interesting
- [ ] Puts hands out for you to wash them
- [ ] Looks at a few pages in a book with you
- [ ] Helps you dress him/her by pushing arm through sleeve or lifting up foot

Language/Communication Milestones

- [ ] Tries to say three or more words besides “mama” or “dada”
- [ ] Follows one-step directions without any gestures, like giving you the toy when you say, “Give it to me.”

Cognitive Milestones

- [ ] Copies you doing chores, like sweeping with a broom
- [ ] Plays with toys in a simple way, like pushing a toy car

Movement/Physical Dev Milestones

- [ ] Walks without holding on to anyone or anything
- [ ] Scribbles
- [ ] Drinks from a cup without a lid and may spill sometimes
- [ ] Feeds himself/herself with his/her fingers
- [ ] Tries to use a spoon
- [ ] Climbs on and off a couch or chair without help

24 Month (2 Year) Milestones

Social/Emotional Milestones

- [ ] Notices when others are hurt or upset, like pausing or looking sad when someone is crying
- [ ] Looks at your face to see how to react in a new situation

Language/Communication Milestones

- [ ] Points to things in a book when asked, like “Where is the bear?”
- [ ] Says at least two words together, like “More milk.”
- [ ] Points to at least two body parts when you asked to show
- [ ] Uses more gestures than just waving and pointing, like blowing a kiss or nodding yes

Cognitive Milestones

- [ ] Holds something in one hand while using the other hand; for example, holding a container and taking the lid off
- [ ] Tries to use switches, knobs, or buttons on a toy
- [ ] Plays with more than one toy at the same time, like putting toy food on a toy plate

Movement/Physical Dev Milestones

- [ ] Kicks a ball
- [ ] Runs
- [ ] Walks (not climbs) up a few stairs with or without help
- [ ] Eats with a spoon

Ages and Stages Questionnaires (ASQ's)

The ASQ-3 is a set of questionnaires that helps track your child's development from one month to age 5. In the pages that follow, links to the ASQ's up until 2 years old are provided in PDF format. Included are also a list of activities to engage your baby in if they may not be reaching all their milestones.

Click **here** to view free a ASQ developmental screening website

Click **here** for a downloadable pdf of ASQ's up until 5 years-old and suggested intervention activities

Community Resources

The following pages include a list of Arizona community resources that can be accessed by you and your family following your exit from the Smooth Way Home program.

Resources are split into multiple categories including:

- **Healthcare & Medical Services**
- **Early Intervention & Developmental Support**
- **Mental Health & Emotional Support**
- **Parent & Caregiver Support**
- **Food & Nutrition Assistance**
- **Housing & Financial Assistance**
- **Childcare & Family Support**

Each resource includes a brief description of the services offered and contact information, such as phone numbers and websites, when available. Some programs may have specific eligibility requirements, service areas, waitlists, or costs, so families are encouraged to contact organizations directly to learn more.

Healthcare And Medical Services Resources

01 Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS)

- Health coverage for eligible Arizona families and children.
- Can cover doctor visits, hospital care, prescriptions, behavioral health, specialists, transportation to medical appointments, and children's developmental services.
- Apply for AHCCCS online **here**
- Application PDFs: **Application for Benefits**
- **Aplicación de Beneficios**

02 KidsCare- Children's Health Insurance

KidsCare provides health insurance for eligible Arizona children under age 19 who do not qualify for AHCCCS and meet program requirements. Families who need coverage for their infant or other children can check eligibility through the program.

- **Phone:** 1-855-432-7587
- Apply for benefits **here**

02 Birth To Five Helpline

The **Birth to Five Helpline** offers free support to Arizona caregivers with questions about infant and toddler development, feeding, sleep, behavior, and parenting. It can be a helpful first step when a caregiver is unsure whether a concern is typical or where to seek additional support.

- **Phone:** 877-705-KIDS (5437)

Early Intervention & Developmental Support



01 Arizona Early Intervention Program (AzEIP)

AzEIP provides early intervention services and support for eligible infants and toddlers with disabilities or developmental delays. Families can refer a child if they have concerns about developmental milestones.

- **AzEIP referral: 888-592-0140**
- More information on AzEIP continued on p.

02 Southwest Human Development- Birth to Five Center of Excellence

- **The Birth to Five Center of Excellence** provides coordinated health and developmental services for children from birth through age 5 in **Maricopa County**.
- Services include: support from pediatric professionals, OT, PT, speech, feeding, and mental health specialists.
- **Phone:** (602) 468-3430
- **Email:** Coe@swhd.org

04 First Things First

- **First Things First** supports Arizona families with young children from birth to age 5 by connecting families with free early childhood programs and resources.
- Families can use the **"Find Your Region"** tool on the FTF website to locate resources available in their community.
- Phone number: 602-771-5100
- Birth to Five Helpline: 877-705-KIDS (5437)

Mental Health & Emotional Support



01 Postpartum Support International

Postpartum Support International (PSI) is a non-profit organization that provides free resources, peer support, and education for families dealing with mental health challenges during pregnancy, postpartum, and after loss.

- **Phone Support:** Call or text **1-800-944-4773** (Press 1 for Spanish, Press 2 for English).
- **Text Support:** Text "Help" to **800-944-4773** (English) or **971-203-7773** (Spanish).

02 Groundwork AZ

Groundwork AZ is a nonprofit counseling organization that provides developmentally appropriate mental health services for children from birth to age 12 and their families.

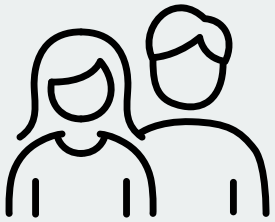
- Services include play therapy, support with emotional regulation, anxiety, behavioral challenges, trauma, and family relationships.
- Insurance-based, reduced-cost, free counseling options
- **Phone:** 480-853-1635

03 Women's Health Innovations of Arizona

WHI of Arizona provides mental health counseling and support for women, children, teens, and families throughout different stages of life.

- Services include: maternal and postpartum counseling, individual and family therapy, parenting support and counseling.
- **Phone:** 480-339-7119
- **Email:** intake@whiarizona.com

Parent & Caregiver Support



01 Encircle Families

Encircle Families offers parent-to-parent connections, caregiver education, support groups, and help navigating services for children with disabilities or complex healthcare needs.

Phone numbers:

- Phoenix: 602-242-4366; Tucson: 520-441-4007; Yuma: 928-444-8803

Email: info@encirclefamilies.org

Request support **here**

02 4th Trimester Arizona

4th Trimester Arizona connects families with parent support groups, postpartum mental health resources, educational materials, and lactation support.

- Support groups include: Virtual Village, Dad Village, Black Mamas Support Village, Indigenous Parents Support, Pueblo de Mamas Latinas, West Valley, East Valley, and Tucson

Phone Support: (480) 269-1639

Email: info@4thtrimesteraz.org

03 Smooth Way Home Parent Support Groups

The Smoothy Way Home Parent Support Group offers opportunity for families discharged from the NICU to connect with other parents who may share similar experiences. Topics vary every month.

- First Wednesday of each month (Feb-Dec) at 10AM
- Zoom link **here**
- Email JHarrison@swhd.org for more information or assistance

Food & Nutrition Assistance



01 Arizona Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

- **Arizona WIC** services provides eligible pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding women, infants, and children under age five with nutritious foods, nutrition education, breastfeeding support, and referrals to healthcare and community services.
- Find out if you are eligible for services **here**
- Start your WIC application **here**
- Find a clinic **here** or call 1-800-252-5942

02 Arizona Nutrition Assistance (SNAP)

Arizona SNAP offers eligible households monthly benefits on an EBT card to purchase groceries and other eligible food items.

- Information needed for eligibility **here**
- **Phone:** 1-855-432-7587
- Apply online for SNAP **here**

03 Arizona Food Bank Network

The **Arizona Food Bank Network** helps families find food banks, food pantries, and community meal programs throughout Arizona. This is a useful starting point for caregivers who need groceries quickly or want to locate nearby food distribution sites.

- Find a food bank near you **here**
- **Phone:** (602)528-3434
- **Email:** info@axfoodbanks.org

Housing & Financial Assistance



01 211 Arizona

211 Arizona connects families with local rental assistance, emergency shelter, eviction prevention, utility payment assistance, and community financial support programs.

- 211 call specialists can help connect people to locally available resources and services. Call 2-1-1 for more information.
- **Phone:** Dial 2-1-1 or 877-211-8661
- Search shelter & housing locations **here**

02 Arizona Department of Housing

The **Arizona Department of Housing** provides information and referrals for affordable housing, local rental assistance and eviction prevention programs, and housing resources for people experiencing homelessness.

- Search for affordable housing **here** or call 877-428-8844
- Search homeless assistance agencies **here**
- Learn more about the Arizona Rental Assistance & Eviction Prevention programs **here**

03 Ronald McDonald House

The Ronald McDonald House Charities provides temporary, home-like lodging for eligible families so they can remain close to their child during medical treatment. Amenities may include bedrooms, shared kitchens, laundry facilities, and family spaces.

- **Central and Northern Arizona: Phoenix and Mesa locations.**
- Phone: 602-264-2654; Website **here**
- **Southern Arizona: Tucson**
- Phone: 520-326-0060; Website **here**

Childcare & Family Support



01 Arizona Child Care Resource & Referral

The **AzCCRR** helps families search for childcare providers and understand childcare options, quality, and licensing. This is a useful starting point for families returning to work, school, or other responsibilities after their baby's NICU stay.

- Complete the child care provider search **here**
- Explore family resources **here**
- **Phone:** 1-800-308-9000

02 Arizona DES Child Care Assistance

The Arizona DES offers **Child Care Assistance** Helps eligible families pay for childcare so parents and guardians can work, attend school, or participate in other approved activities. A waiting list is in place for many applicants, so families should check current availability and eligibility.

- Apply for benefits **here** or email **DESChildCare@azdes.gov**
- Paper **application** and in **Spanish**

03 Head Start/Early Head Start

Head Start provides early childhood education and family support for eligible pregnant people and families with children from birth to age 3. Depending on the program, services may include home-based visits, caregiver education, developmental activities, and connections to health and community services.

- Use the **Head Start Locator** to find a program near you
- See this **Arizona Head Start information sheet** to find your local program (also available in **Spanish**)

How To Contact And Access Arizona Early Intervention Program (AzEIP)

1 Visit the AzEIP website

Find the AzEIP website **here** to learn more about the services and check developmental milestones **here** if you have concerns of your child meeting them.

2 Make A Referral to AzEIP

Parents, caregivers, healthcare providers, or other concerned individuals can refer a child **here** if they are not reaching appropriate milestone (s).
Refer through **email**: AzEIP.Info@encirclefamilies.org

3 Contact AzEIP

Call 1-888-592-0140 for assistance finding the appropriate local program.
Or apply online **here**.
To check the status of a referral: Contact **AzEIP@azdes.gov** or **(602) 532-9960**

4 Schedule And Evaluation

An early intervention team will contact your family to discuss concerns and determine whether an evaluation is appropriate.

5 Complete The Evaluation

Qualified professionals assess the child's development, including areas such as communication, movement, learning, and social-emotional skills.

6 Begin Services If Eligible

If your child qualifies, the family works with the team to develop an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) outlining goals and services.

Try This At Home

An Everyday Routines and Occupations Worksheet

1. Our Everyday Routines

What does a typical day look like for you and your baby?

A routine that is going well for us:

_____

A routine that feels challenging right now:

_____

One thing that helps make our day easier:

_____

2. Growing Together Through Everyday Activities

Choose one activity you and your baby do together.

□ Feeding

□ Diaper changes

□ Getting dressed

□ Bathing

□ Playtime

□ Soothing or cuddling

□ Bedtime or rest

□ Other: _____

What do we usually do during this activity?

_____

How does my baby let me know they are comfortable, interested, tired, or needing a break?

_____

What do I enjoy about this time with my baby?

_____

Try This At Home
An Everyday Routines and Occupations Worksheet

3. Supporting My Baby's Development

Choose one small way to connect with your baby during an everyday routine.

□ Talk, sing, or read to my baby

□ Pause and respond to my baby's sounds or movements

□ Follow my baby's interests during play

□ Reduce noise or stimulation when my baby needs a break

□ Allow time for my baby to move and explore safely

□ Other: _____

One thing I want to try this week:

_____

4. Checking In With Myself

Caring for a baby after a NICU stay can bring many emotions and adjustments. My needs matter, too.

One thing I feel confident doing with my baby:

_____

One thing I would like more support or information about:

_____

One person or resource I can reach out to for support:

_____