

Table 2: Parent Perspectives on Behaviors Associated with Early Relational Health

	THEME	EXEMPLAR QUOTE(S)
RESPONSIVE PARENTING	Responsive parenting involves “trial and error” and observing the child’s response. This requires patience and flexibility.	<p>“When I see she’s almost crying, I change her position. If she’s lying on one spot, I have to maybe move around the house, sometimes I walk outside to calm her down...talk to her, and then, yeah, she feels engaged with me...In other words, I am just being observant and patient with her.” [Parent of infant born at 31wks now 3mos, corrected to 1mo]</p> <p>“I just feel like patience is the most important thing about you becoming a mother because days will come and you will feel really, really frustrated because you don’t know what they want or what they’re trying to say to you. But at the end of the day, if you connect with your babies and you come and you let them know what’s wrong, even though they can’t talk to you, they will lay down on you or something to make you feel better, you know? I feel like it makes them stronger because you’ve gotta have patience and you just gotta be there for them.” [Parent of twins born at 33wks now 13mos, corrected to 11mos]</p>
	The experience of having a baby hospitalized in the NICU makes parents have heightened attention to their child’s needs after discharge.	<p>“I always have it in the back of my mind that this was a season where I wasn’t able to be with my child. And so I think my sensitivity to her in terms of attending to her needs urgently stemmed from that because having to leave your child in the NICU is very, very difficult...And so I’m always, always around her just to make sure that she’s ok because there was a point in time when I wasn’t able to. And so that can be hard.” [Parent of infant born at 31wks now 6mos, corrected to 4mos]</p>
STRUCTURE/ ROUTINES	Routines promote family wellbeing and reduce stress through providing predictability and organization, facilitating rest, and promoting happiness.	<p>“When you have a routine it’s more organized with babies...after awhile they start getting used to doing whatever you do at that time and so that’s what they want to do.” [Parent of twins born at 24wks now 22mos, corrected to 18mos]</p> <p>“I feel like [routines are] important because I think that because I work during the day, I want to make sure that, for example, he rests and I get rest as well.” [Parent of infant born at 26wks now 35mos]</p> <p>“They’re [child born preterm]...happier to do it because they know that this is what’s gonna happen and it makes them do it a little faster because they know that this is already going to happen.” [Parent of infant born at 31wks now 28mos]</p>
	Some parents believe that screentime helps them build relationships with their children while others try to avoid it.	<p>“He knows that, because I work all day, that we need to have quiet time [at night]. We’ll read a book or we’ll just watch a movie for me to de-stress my brain.” [Parent of infant born at 26wks now 35mos]</p> <p>“So now we constantly read to her, we play with her and where she can see that face-to-face interacting. We eliminate screen time. So we don’t do any screen times even though family members think she should.” [Parent of infant born at 31wks now 6mos, corrected to 4mos]</p>
NURTURING RELATIONSHIP	Parents feel a unique and intense bond with their children born preterm. At times, this can be overwhelming.	<p>“It makes me feel good that she knows I’m her mother and no one else. She won’t allow a stranger in her face. I like that, but at some point, I want to have some me time and let her play with her sister...Sometimes like it gets overwhelming, because she can’t allow anyone else except me.” [Parent of infant born at 26wks now 25mos]</p>

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CHILD FACTORS	Parents express differing views about whether they care for children born preterm differently than those born full term.	<p>"I mean, I get it from both sides. I mean, I try to treat him as normal, but because of the difference in his body and growth, there are special things that I do for him that I wouldn't have done it for my first baby. But I do try to keep it as normal as possible, because I don't want him to be afraid of the world. I want him to go out and explore it, and understand that I'm just here for support. I'm here to make sure that he feels safe enough to go do that. So, like I try to keep it as close to that as possible so that he can go and be a normal kid. I don't want him to be running around like I can't do that, because I'm a preemie. Like no." [Parent of infant born at 27wks now 14mos, corrected to 11mos]</p> <p>"I try to do the same thing how I did with my other kids besides with [child's name] it's just more precaution[s] but I do the same thing that I did with my other two kids, treat them all the same. I don't make him feel any different." [Parent of infant born at 30wks now 20mos, corrected to 18mos]</p>
	Parents of children born preterm note that medical vulnerability impacts how they spend time together.	<p>"I don't feel like there's accessible things to do. Like, playgroups and stuff like that. Playgroups, yeah, because I could go to a playgroup but it's hard to play in a playgroup when your kid's attached to so many things, especially when you know he wants to play and do stuff. Because it's like, I'm bringing all these machines to, like this one toy and then we're done with that one toy. And I'm bringing all this stuff to the other toy. I feel like I'm managing the supplies more than I'm managing spending time with them." [Parent of infant born at 29wks now 22mos, corrected to 19mos]</p>
	Non-modifiable factors such as child temperament and developmental stage affect how parents build relationships with their children.	<p>"He's not locked into reading as yet because at one point I was worried, I was like, he doesn't like reading...he doesn't sit. I was talking to the early intervention and he was like, don't worry about it. Some kids are like that. They just want to be all over. I really don't have a routine with him it's just like whenever I go to sit with him I try to read with him and he'll sit there for a while. And then he's gone or he just puts the book away he's gone again." [Parent of infant born at 26wks now 19mos, corrected to 16mos]</p> <p>"I think in the beginning when he was a couple months old, for sure, I felt like it was really different. I didn't feel as connected with him, because I didn't get to bond a whole lot with him. So that was really, really hard and when he was like six months old and, or like nine months old and he was just patiently behind, obviously. So he would be six months, but technically he would only be like four months. So that was like really difficult to figure out what to do with a six month old, but he's not technically a six month old and that made it really hard, but I think now that he's older and he knows a little bit more. It's way easier for sure to bond with him a lot more compared to when she was younger." [Parent of child born at 29 weeks now 17mos, corrected to 14mos]</p>

Wks indicates weeks, Mos indicates months

Corrected age represents chronologic age corrected for prematurity (only for children <24mos)