

Siblings

In the past, concerns about sibling visitation in the NICU focused on fears of infection and disruption of nursing routines. These fears have not been substantiated, and sibling visits should be a part of the normal operation of NICUs (Fig. 8-14). Clearly defined policies and procedures should be developed to facilitate sibling visitation (American Academy of Pediatrics and American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, 2012; Gooding, Cooper, Blaine, et al, 2011).



FIG 8-14 Siblings visiting in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). (Photo courtesy of E. Jacobs, Texas Children's Hospital, Houston, TX.)

The birth of a preterm infant is a difficult time for siblings, who rely on the support of understanding parents. When the happy anticipation is changed to sadness, worry, and altered routines, siblings are bewildered and deprived of their parents' attention. They know something is wrong, but they have only a dim understanding of what it is. Concern about the negative effects on visiting siblings of seeing the ill newborn has not been confirmed. Children have not hesitated to approach or touch the infant, and children younger than 5 years old have been less reluctant than older children; in addition, there have been no measurable differences between previsit and postvisit behaviors.

The potential benefits of sibling visits must be weighed against exposure of the child to the environment of the NICU. Children