



Breaking Down Professional Silos to Improve Infant-Parent Outcomes in Neonatal Care

Christy Gliniak, PhD, OTR/L, CNT, CPXP, NTMTC
Sue Ludwig, OTR/L, CNT



OBJECTIVES

- Define the collaborative specialty of neonatal therapy and describe its unique contribution within the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) team.
- Explain the value of interprofessional collaboration in the NICU and identify how coordinated teamwork supports optimal infant and family outcomes.

Before the Beginning



Neonatal Therapy

Neonatal therapy is a complex subspecialty, an area of advanced practice. It is the art and science of integrating typical development of the infant and family into the environment of the NICU. Neonatal therapy incorporates theories and scopes of practice from the respective disciplines of **occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech-language pathology**. It requires advanced knowledge of the diagnoses and medical interventions inherent to the NICU setting to provide safe and effective assessment, planning, and intervention. At this early point in the lifespan, neonatal therapy **promotes optimal long-term developmental outcomes and nurtures psychosocial care of infant-parent relationships** by addressing the following synergistic systems that affect neurodevelopment: neurobehavioral, neuromotor, neuroendocrine, and sensory. These systems provide the foundation for the **development of functional skills**. Preventative, habilitative, and/or rehabilitative approaches are utilized as appropriate.



Value of Silos



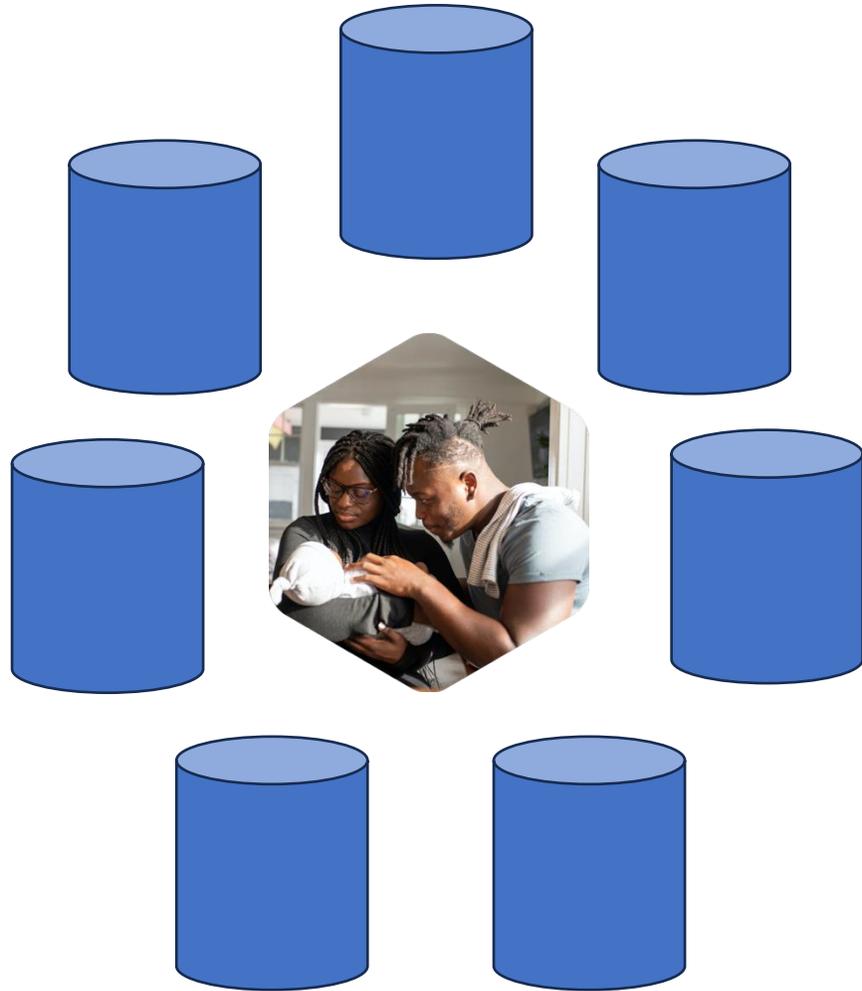
- Education & background
- Unique perspective
- Role Clarity
- Body of science
- Skill acquisition
- Competency
- Focused & efficient services

Families have their own equally valuable silos.

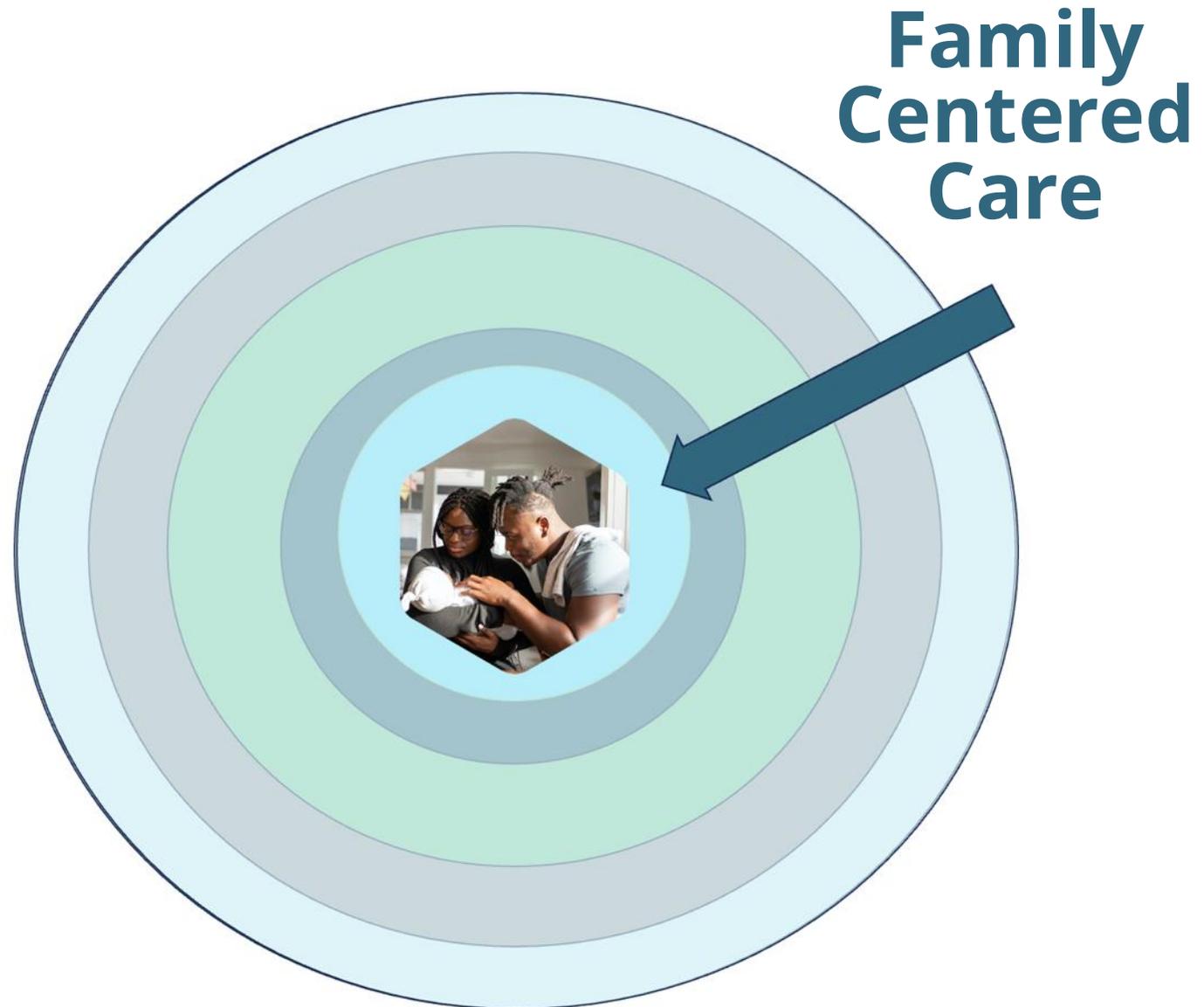
Value of Breaking Down the Silos



Shifting the Environment of Care

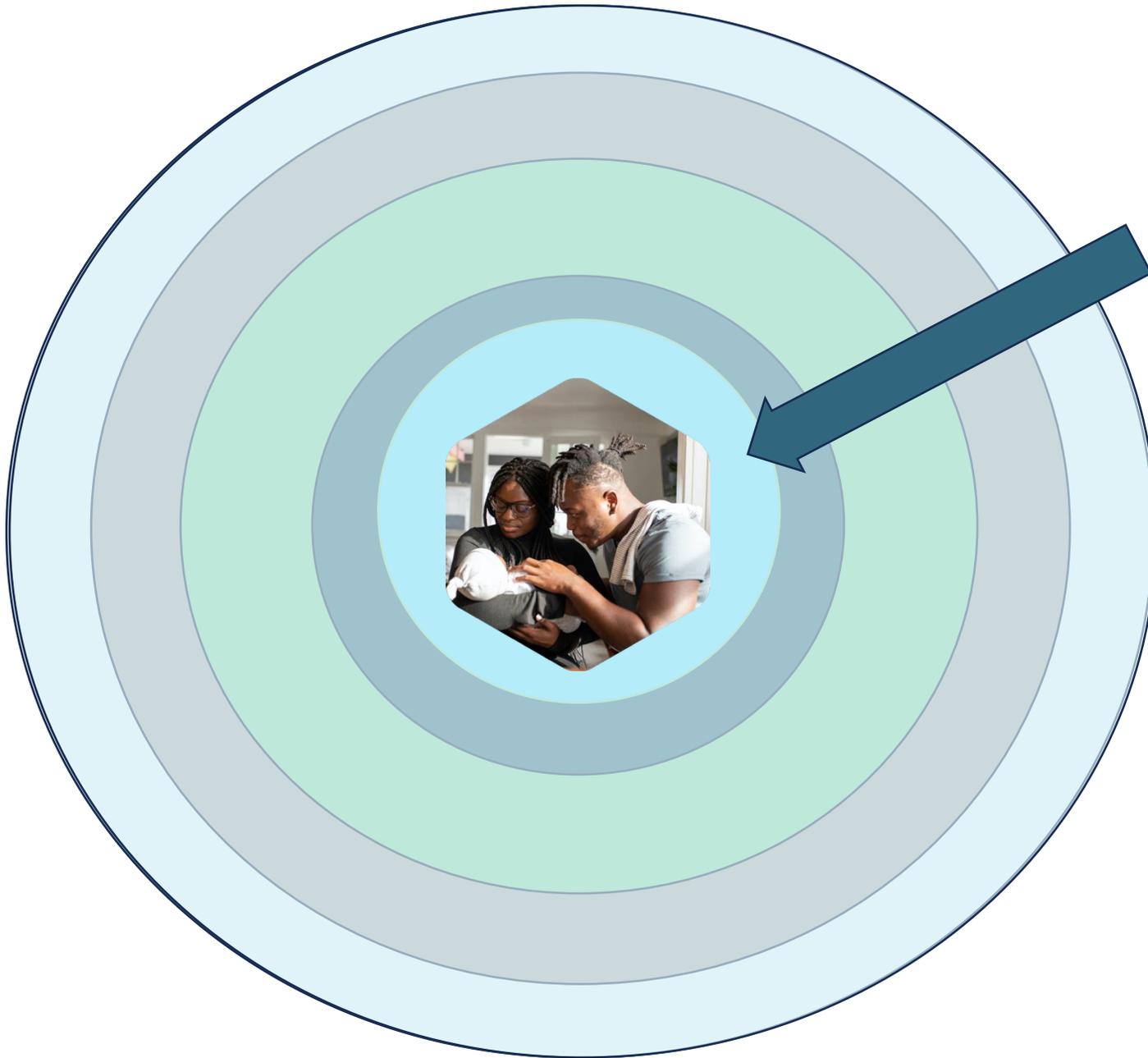


Silos



**Family
Centered
Care**

Considering the Ecosystem of the NICU



Microsystem:

Family — parents/caregivers, siblings, NICU Team (MD, nurse, respiratory, dietician, social work, neonatal therapists (OT/PT/SLP), discharge coordinator, pharmacy, specialists, Parent advocate, administration, front desk staff, housekeeping, etc.)



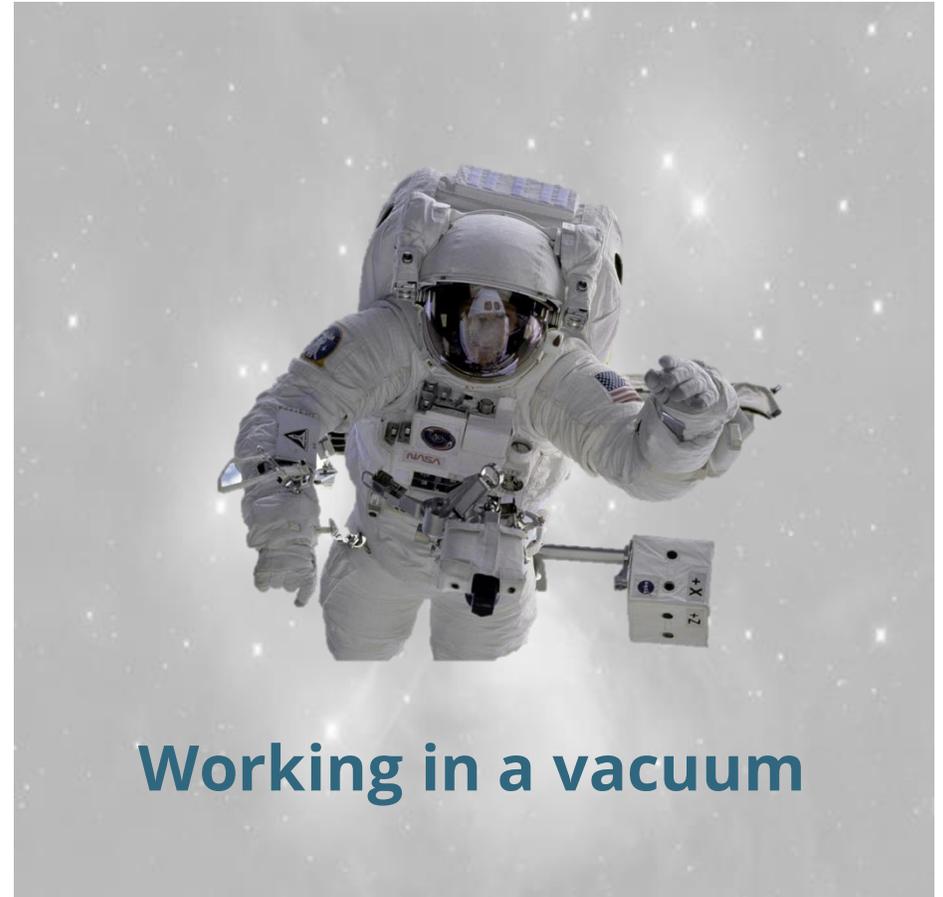
Mesosystem (interactions between Microsystems)

(Home, grandparents, siblings, Interprofessional team
Hospital, Ronald McDonald staff, etc.)

***Based on Ecological Systems Theory**

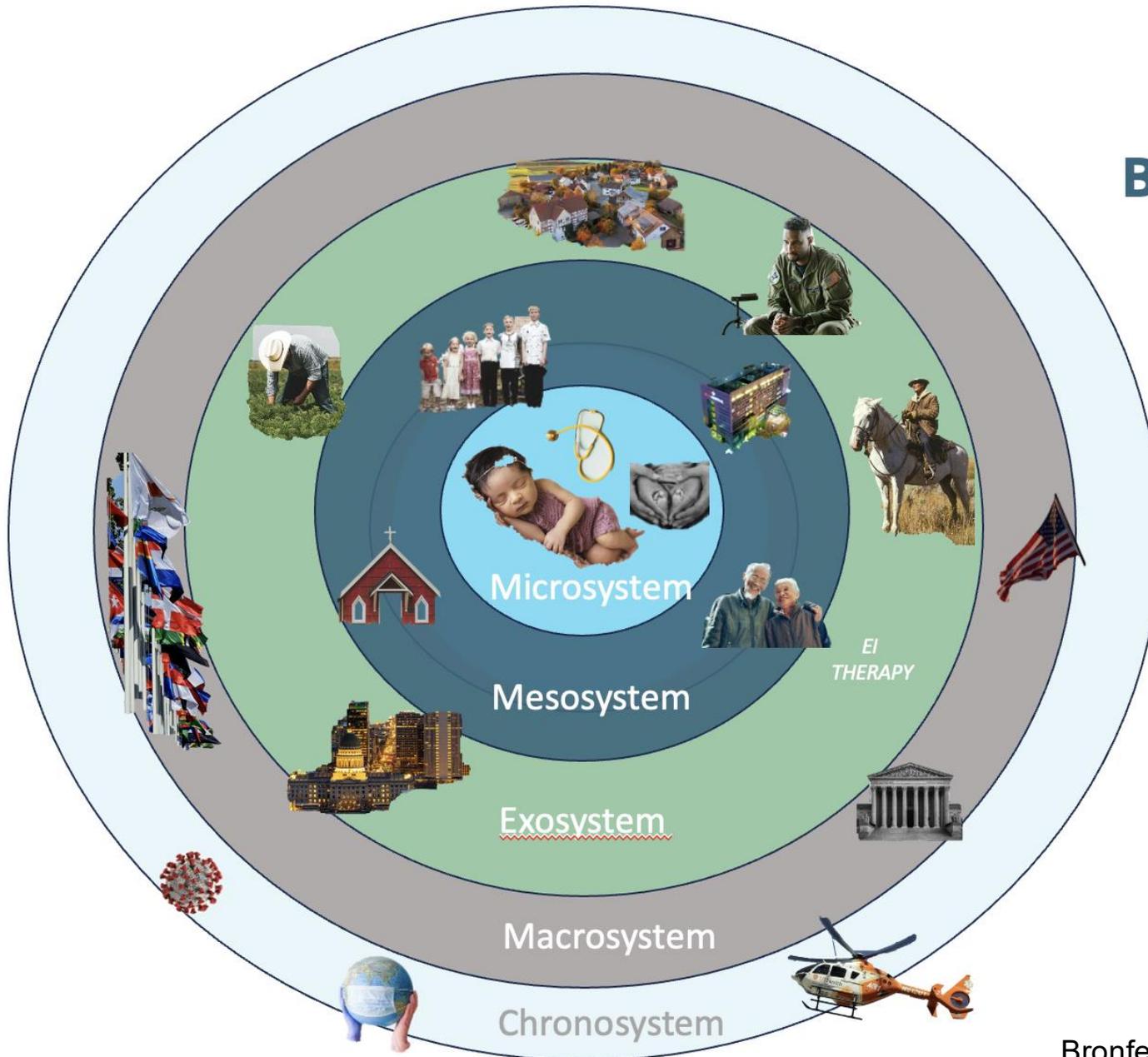
The Hidden Cost of Silos on the Environment of Care

- Lack of clear policy and shared guidelines
- Unclear Accountability
- Fragmented Care
- Delayed decision-making (delays in general)
- Mixed Messages from staff
- Distrust and Conflict (Interprofessional/Families)



Working in a vacuum

Ecology of Human Development: Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model



-  **Microsystem** (Family, Caregivers, NICU)
-  **Mesosystem** (Home, grandparents, siblings, Hospital, Ronald McDonald)
-  **Exosystem** (home neighborhood/community, Parents work)
-  **Macrosystem** (Culture (customs/values), laws, policy, government)
-  **Chronosystem** (historical context, life events)

Bronfenbrenner, U.(2005). *Making human beings human: Bioecological perspectives on human development*. Sage.

From Silos to Smooth Teamwork

- **Cooperation** — trust & team-oriented mindset
- **Coordination** — shared performance monitoring, adaptability, & support
- **Communication** — must be clear & timely
- **Cognition** — shared understanding of roles and abilities
- **Coaching** — leadership & clear expectations
- **Conflict** — psychological safety (interpersonal skills & conflict resolution)
- **Conditions** — supportive context for teams & positive reinforcement

From Highly Reliable Teams — (Salas & Rosen, 2013)



Connection, Belonging, Outcomes, Quality of Life



The Tangible Impact of Collaboration

Thank You!



A candle loses nothing by
lighting another candle.

James Keller

REFERENCES

- Bronfenbrenner, U. (2005). *Making human beings human: Bioecological perspectives on human development*. sage.
- Craig, J. W., & Smith, C. R. (2020). Risk-adjusted/neuroprotective care services in the NICU: the elemental role of the neonatal therapist (OT, PT, SLP). *Journal of perinatology*, 40(4), 549-559.
- Ludwig, S. (2022). *Tiny humans, big lessons: How the NICU taught me to live with energy, intention, and purpose*. Page Two Books, Inc.
- NANT Professional Collaborative, National Association of Neonatal Therapists. (2021). *What is Neonatal Therapy?* <https://neonataltherapists.com/about/>
- Salas, E., & Rosen, M. A. (2013). Building high reliability teams: progress and some reflections on teamwork training. *BMJ quality & safety*, 22(5), 369–373.
<https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjqs-2013-002015>
- Tawfik, D. S., Sexton, J. B., Adair, K. C., Kaplan, H. C., & Profit, J. (2017). Context in Quality of Care: Improving Teamwork and Resilience. *Clinics in Perinatology*, 44(3), 541-552.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.clp.2017.04.004>