

Charlie's Baby Brother is a Preemie

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Original idea
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**PRÉMA-
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Pour les enfants prématurés
For Premies

Université 
de Montréal

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Text

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Illustrations

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Translation

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*To Charlotte, Laura and their parents, who forever changed how I work
with families whose infant is hospitalized in the neonatal unit.*

P.S.

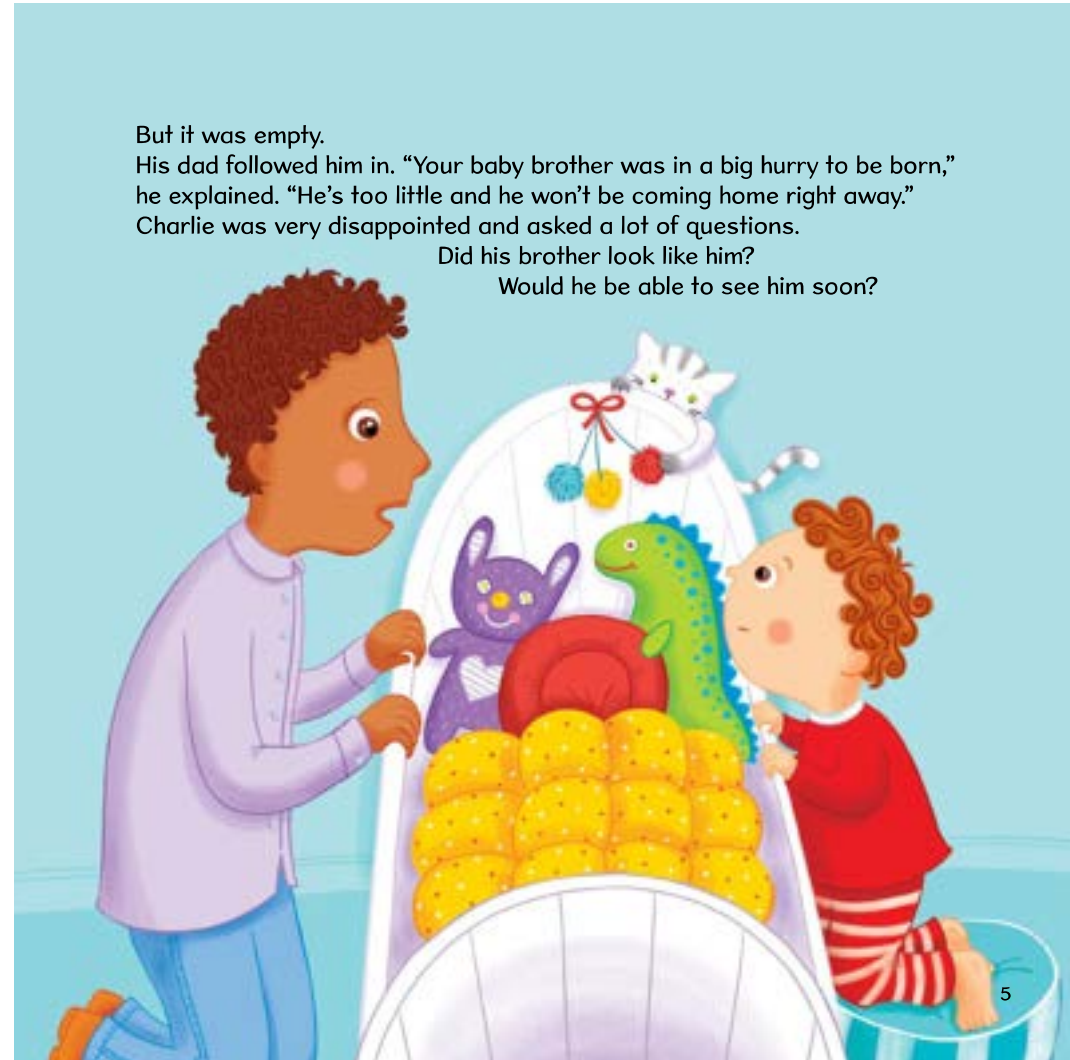
Charlie woke up in a really good mood this morning.
His baby brother had finally arrived.
Charlie jumped out of bed and rushed into the baby's room.



But it was empty.
His dad followed him in. "Your baby brother was in a big hurry to be born,"
he explained. "He's too little and he won't be coming home right away."
Charlie was very disappointed and asked a lot of questions.

Did his brother look like him?

Would he be able to see him soon?



But the answers from his parents were always vague. Every morning at breakfast, his mom put the box of his favourite cereal in front of his bowl. But she didn't pour it the way she used to. And his dad didn't make funny faces any more.

"Today your babysitter will be here with you all day," said his mom. "We're going to see your brother at the hospital." "Can I go with you?"

"No, not right now." "But why?" asked Charlie.

His parents didn't say anything. Every day was the same thing.



"I was looking forward to playing with my brother," he thought to himself.
"Maybe it's my fault he came too early."

That night, Charlie couldn't sleep. He tossed and turned.
Suddenly, he heard a little voice.
"Careful! You're going to squish me!"
Surprised, Charlie lifted up his sheet. He saw a funny little person
with a bright red bonnet on his head.



“Don’t be scared!” said the little creature.
“My name is Liam and I’m an elf! With my magic bonnet
I can make all your wishes come true!”
“Are, are you really real?” Charlie babbled.
“Enough talking. Time to sleep,” replied the elf. Right away,
Charlie fell fast asleep.

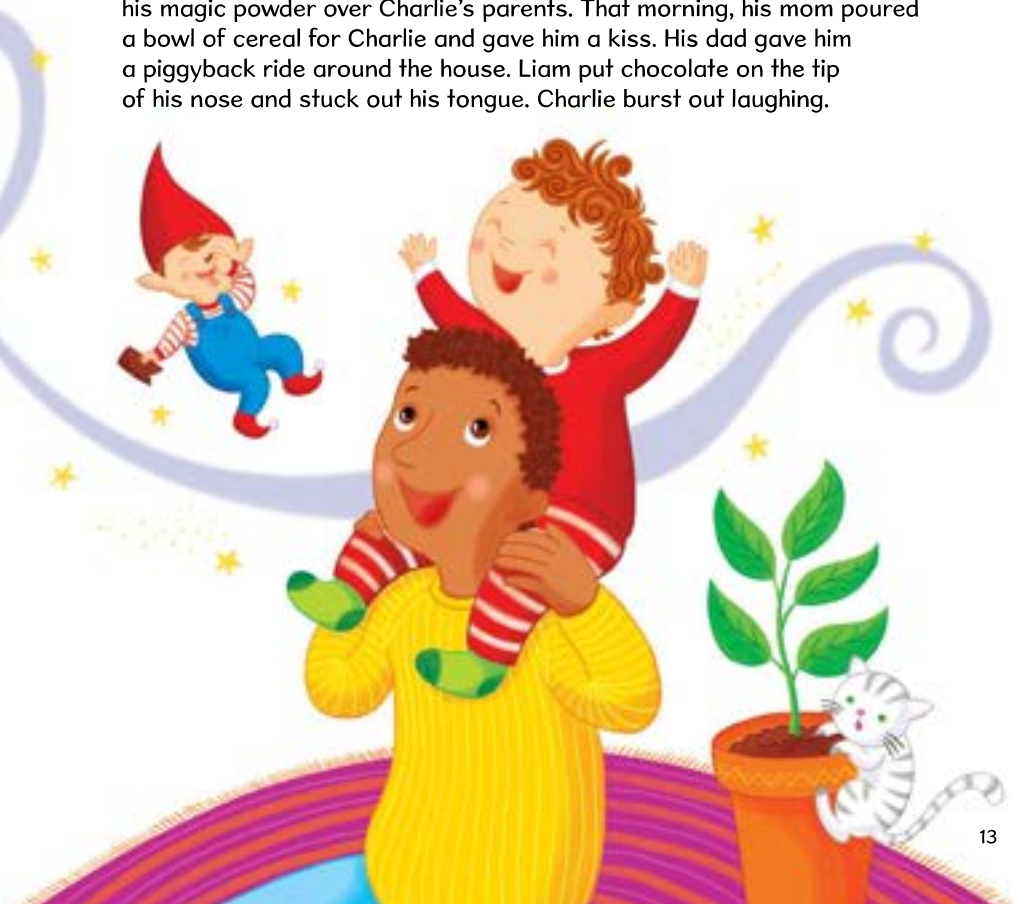


When he woke up the next morning, Charlie was all alone in his bed.
“Just a dream,” he told himself, a little disappointed.

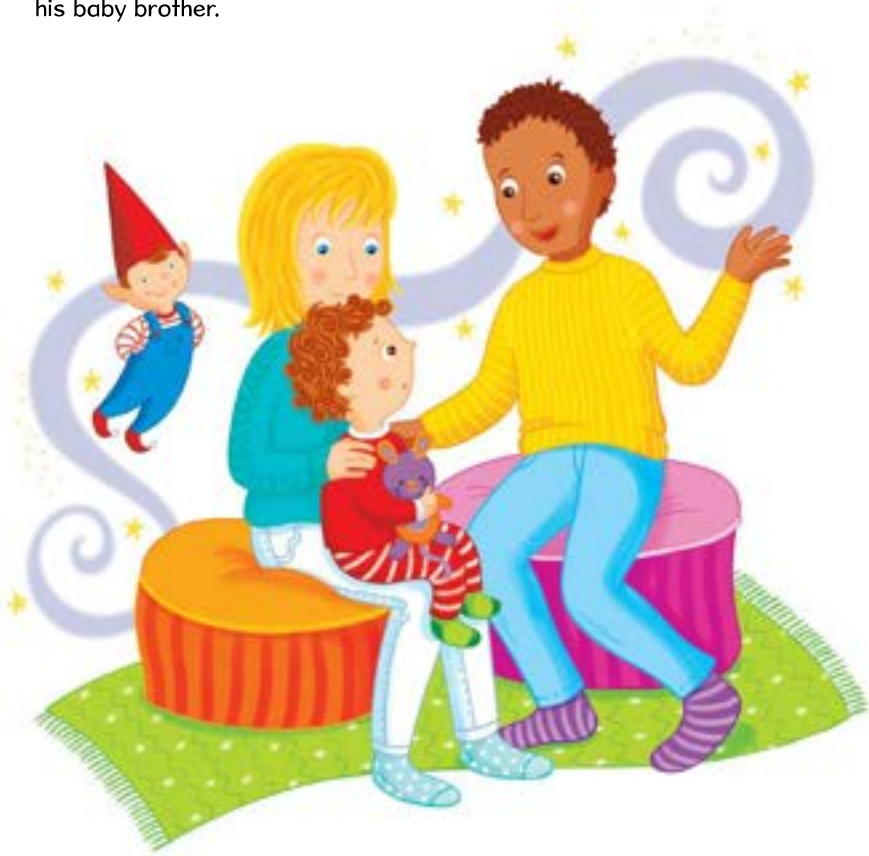


“Hey! Charlie!” he heard suddenly.
And the elf popped up beside him.
“I’m here to play with you and make all your wishes come true,” said Liam.
“What would make you happy?”
“I’d really like my parents to be the way they used to be,” Charlie exclaimed.

“Easy!” cried the elf. And Liam took off his bonnet and sprinkled his magic powder over Charlie’s parents. That morning, his mom poured a bowl of cereal for Charlie and gave him a kiss. His dad gave him a piggyback ride around the house. Liam put chocolate on the tip of his nose and stuck out his tongue. Charlie burst out laughing.



With help from the elf, Charlie's parents decided to talk to him about his baby brother.



Charlie learned that he was living in an incubator, a kind of a shelter that protected him. And that there were a lot of machines and people who were helping him to get bigger and stronger. Then his parents explained that it wasn't his fault, or anybody else's fault, that his brother had come so early.



One day, his mom told him that all three of them were going to visit his baby brother. Charlie was so happy that he decided to make a drawing for him.

“Very nice!” exclaimed the little elf. “You’ll see, you’re going to get along just fine. I know that he’ll like to play and make faces like me!”



But Charlie was a little bit scared.
It was the first time he had been to a hospital.
“Don’t worry, I’ll stay with you the whole time,” Liam whispered.

They all came to a big room. That’s where they look after the babies
who were in a hurry to be born. Charlie was very impressed.
There were all kinds of tubes, machines and people walking very fast.



Charlie's parents took his hand and they went over to his brother. Charlie was surprised to see that the baby was wearing a red bonnet like his friend Liam! Excited, Charlie turned towards the elf... but he was gone!



His mom picked Charlie up and hugged him. "We've found a great name for your baby brother. We're going to call him Liam," she said.



In a flash, Charlie understood everything. He whispered softly,
“Liam...so it was you?
I can hardly wait till you come home!”



The End

*To Raphaël,
my forever baby, my stardust...*

Information for parents

The impact of a preterm birth and the hospitalization of an infant in the neonatal unit on siblings and the whole family

A preterm birth is an unexpected event that can be traumatic for all family members. A hospitalization in the neonatal unit can have serious repercussions for you and your family.

This story is about a subject of interest to all healthcare professionals working in neonatology as well as to parents: how siblings adapt to the hospitalization of an infant in the neonatal unit.

The story targets children ages 4 to 8. You or your child can read the story, but a parent has to be there to answer questions and offer any needed explanations. We hope that this tool will help you to recognize your child's needs and to begin introducing your child to this new family member and to the mysterious world of a neonatal unit.

Happy reading!

Resources

Website on sibling adaptation:
<https://sites.google.com/site/fratriesibling/>

Préma-Québec:
<http://www.premaquebec.ca>

Préma-Québec support and referral line:
(450) 651-4909 or toll-free 1 888 651-4909

Health and psychological advice:
Info-Santé/Info-social: 811,
Ordre des psychologues du Québec: 514 738-1223 or toll-free 1 800 561-1223,
Your neighbourhood Local Community Services Centre (CLSC),
Family Physician

Advice

Advice to help your child adapt to having a baby brother or sister hospitalized in the neonatal unit

- Explain the preterm birth and the hospitalization in the neonatal unit using a vocabulary appropriate to your child's age as soon as possible so that he or she will understand the situation.
- Reassure your child and explain that he or she is not responsible for the situation.
- Maintain family routines to make your child feel secure.
- Encourage your child to express feelings.
- When necessary, leave your child in the care of someone familiar and trusted.
- Take a photo of the newborn to give your child an idea of the size of the baby brother or sister compared to a common item, such as your hand or a familiar toy.
- Suggest that your child make a drawing that can be given to the newborn. You can also record your child singing a lullaby or reading a story to be played to the new brother or sister.
- Plan, with the care team, visits to the preterm infant and the neonatal unit with your child as soon as possible. If the visitation policy of the neonatal unit where your infant is hospitalized limits the presence of children, there are other solutions that can be discussed with the care team.
- Plan for quality one-on-one time with your child so that he or she will feel special.

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Charlie is very happy!
His baby brother has finally been born.
But his parents come home from the hospital without him,
because he was born prematurely and
has to be hospitalized until he gets stronger.

Charlie is sad until Liam, an elf with magic powers,
arrives and becomes his best friend. Charlie will be less lonely
until his first meeting with his baby brother,
who has a wonderful surprise for him.



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