

MOM KRYSTLE

When Krystle found out she was pregnant with triplets Sariyah, Amirah and Zahra, she thought safely making it through her pregnancy would be her biggest challenge.

As it turns out, it was just the beginning.

Krystle had learned about Nurse-Family Partnership ® in her fourth month of pregnancy, first as a referral from her physician and then in the mail from Sutter Health. Krystle reached out in her second trimester and was quickly connected with nurse Lakisha with Nurse-Family Partnership at Alameda County Public Health Department in California, who made home visits twice a month to provide support for her pregnancy and overall health.

According to Krystle, "It was truly a partnership. I had a friendship with my nurse. It was like a sisterhood."

When the three little girls were born prematurely at 34 weeks, they only weighed about four pounds each. It was exhausting to care for three babies at one time. Krystle also had difficulty breastfeeding, and the medications she took to reduce swelling in her legs also drained her milk. Knowing breastfeeding improves a child's immune function and lowers a mom's risk for breast and ovarian cancer, Krystle's nurse helped her through the process by encouraging her to try different tactics and ensuring she felt supported throughout the process.



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At one month old, nurse Lakisha helped Krystle learn how to care for three babies at once.

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"I felt really guilty for not being able to breastfeed my babies, but Lakisha was there for mental and emotional support, which helped get me through and know it wasn't my fault."

Three months later, Lakisha was also there for Krystle when things began to get worse. The babies' father was emotionally abusive. He would not allow her to leave the house or use the car without his permission. Worse, he was cutting her off from friends and family, forbidding her own brother from seeing her.

"His behavior escalated. He became increasingly agitated, paranoid and controlling. He locked the stroller and car seat in his office so I couldn't take the babies on walks with me. Once he took one of my daughters while I was sleeping, and I wasn't able to see her for seven days."



When the girls were 1-year old, Krystle had the support from her nurse to ensure their development was on track.

Frightened, alone and unsure of what to do, Krystle turned to Lakisha for help.

Lakisha documented all of Krystle's concerns to help her down the road and encouraged her to do what was best for her and the children. But decisions did not come easily. Krystle had put her own career on hold to care for the babies fulltime and was completely financially dependent on their father.

One night, with Lakisha's support, Krystle took the biggest step of her life. As one of her daughters had been taken, with two babies in her arms, she walked the six blocks to the domestic violence shelter with nothing but the clothes on her back and a small diaper bag.

After relocating to a shelter in another city, Krystle was eventually reunited with her third child. At the shelter, although she felt terribly alone and couldn't tell her friends or family of her location, she committed to restarting a new life.

Having Lakisha's friendship and professional assistance was "life changing," says Krystle. Lakisha kept in contact with Krystle for the three months she stayed in the shelter, assuring her she could make it and bringing her resources like diapers, wipes, baby clothes and three playpens. When the time was

right to take the next step, Lakisha assisted Krystle in processing the necessary information to transition into a new home, helped conduct with the safety inspection for her new location, and provided a health kit for Krystle and the babies.

Nurse-Family Partnership also provided a team to meet Krystle and her family where they were, providing services such as developmental assessments to ensure the girls were developing skillsets that were typical for their age range. For example, the team would evaluate how the triplets grasped objects and interacted with toys, which helped them to assess gross and fine motor function. They would also reflect on the bond between Krystle and her children, and determine whether the children needed any early intervention support.

Krystle still lives in the same home she transitioned into after leaving the shelter. Her daughters are thriving and enrolled in Head Start. Buoyed by the Nurse-Family Partnership's focus on encouraging mothers to work on their own life goals, Krystle decided to build on her bachelor's degree and pursue a master's degree in business. She applied and is waiting on acceptance.

Krystle credits Lakisha and Nurse-Family Partnership for helping her make it through the roughest year of her life.

"Honestly," she said, "I get chills when I think about what this program did for me and my little girls. I am so grateful."



Krystle's daughters are thriving and enrolled in Head Start.