

Meeting the Needs of Your Family and Children

Guidelines for Parents and Caregivers



marshfield
children's hospital



Meeting the Needs of Your Family and Children

When your child becomes hospitalized, it is important to recognize not only their needs, but also the needs and concerns of the entire family. As a parent, you may experience feelings of fear, helplessness, confusion, anger, and worry related to your child's hospitalization. A group of health care professionals at Marshfield Children's Hospital, called child life specialists, understand these feelings and can provide support to you and your family during this critical time.

Communicating with Health Care Professionals

Most health care professionals (i.e. doctors, nurses, psychologists, nutritionists, social workers) believe that parents are an invaluable source of information regarding their hospitalized child. Parents are experts on their children. You can aid in the assessment, observation, and understanding of your child's well-being.

As a parent, it is your right to insist that health care professionals treat you as a partner in the decision-making and treatment planning process.

You are welcome to help with your child's care. Health care professionals may encourage and assist you in becoming actively involved in the routine care of your child while in the hospital (i.e. bathing, changing diapers, feeding, etc.).

In order to become an advocate for your hospitalized child, it is important to develop a trusting relationship with your child's health care providers. The best way to develop a good relationship with health care providers is to express your ideas, concerns, and opinions regarding your child's treatment. You have the right to ask questions about medical procedures and ask for clarification of any concepts that may be confusing to you regarding your child's medical treatment. Gaining more knowledge about your child's illness or disability will help you understand your child's medical treatment.

You have the right to ask about resources that may be available to help you better understand your child's illness or disability.

Most health care professionals are willing to meet your needs. Verbally expressing your concerns and questions at an appropriate time will allow health care providers to address them and provide you with appropriate information and support.

It is important to share information with health care providers about your hospitalized child, such as the child's nickname, favorite toy or game, and any comforting hints to help your child cope with the hospital situation.





Your Role as a Parent During Your Child's Hospitalization

We encourage you to comfort your child while the child is in pain, is ill, or needs to be reassured of your love. However, it is also important to understand that you still need to set boundaries and maintain discipline with your hospitalized child. Many parents, who care for their child while the child is in the hospital, struggle with trying to find a balance between giving too much and not giving enough.

There are several ways to show your love and care without spoiling your child. Give your child hugs, spend quality time playing a game, reading a book, or singing songs.

Interact with your child in a positive, loving, and supportive manner while the child is in the hospital. Some parents are tempted to bring their children special gifts and treats at each visit. This is discouraged. Many children who are given “special” treats during their hospital stay tend to expect the same treats when they return home, which often creates problems for parents who are no longer willing or able to meet the child's desires.

You also are encouraged to continue addressing disciplinary issues with your child while the child is in the hospital. Some children tend to misbehave in the hospital environment. It is the responsibility of the parents, as authority figures, to discipline the child when the child acts negatively. Giving children time-outs, talking to them about their inappropriate behavior, and setting boundaries, are favorable disciplinary techniques that may be used in the hospital setting.

Many parents are intimidated by health care professionals. Yet, health care professionals encourage parents to maintain their routine disciplinary techniques with their hospitalized child and appreciate parents who are willing to address behavioral issues.

Meeting the Needs of Non-Hospitalized Siblings

When your child becomes hospitalized, it is often difficult for you to meet the needs of your non-hospitalized children. As a parent, there are several things that you can do to ensure that the needs of your other children are being met as you care for the needs of your hospitalized child.

First, it is important for you to understand that many siblings of hospitalized children have a wide range of feelings during this stressful time. Most siblings in this situation need reassurance that the sibling is well cared for by the hospital staff.

Talk to your children. Discuss the hospitalized child's situation with their siblings in order to clear up any misunderstandings and misconceptions that may have occurred following the child's admission to the hospital.

You can provide age-appropriate explanations to siblings regarding the illness or injury; also explain the need for the additional attention that is given to the hospitalized child. It is crucial that you take the time to acknowledge the feelings of your healthy children.

If you remain at the hospital to care for your hospitalized child, try to maintain daily contact with your other children by scheduled phone calls, emails, or letters. Daily contact allows healthy siblings to communicate with their parents and express their feelings, thoughts, needs, and concerns.



It is also important for you to maintain consistent family routines, including mealtime and bedtime rituals, in order to provide a degree of normalcy in the lives of all the children.

Siblings also should maintain contact with their brother or sister who is in the hospital. Planned visits are recommended if the doctor gives permission. However, it is important to prepare them for this visit. The Child Life staff at Marshfield Children's Hospital are available if you would like assistance. Child

life specialists are trained to help children understand the various aspects of the hospital setting, provide developmentally-appropriate information about the hospitalized child's illness or treatments, and provide support services to the siblings and family.

Caring for Yourself During Your Child's Hospitalization

As the parent of a child who is hospitalized, you need to consider your emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual needs. Most health care professionals agree that parents of hospitalized children are incapable of providing the appropriate level of care to their child if they have not first cared for themselves.

You need to take time for yourself, relax, take breaks from the hospital environment, and develop healthy coping strategies to deal with having a child in the hospital. Parents caring for hospitalized children also need the support of family and friends in order to maintain balance in their lives.

Remember, it is just as important to care for yourself, as it is to care for your hospitalized child and other family members.

Below are several coping techniques recommended for parents of hospitalized children.

- Keep a journal of the hospital experience
- Listen to relaxing music
- Use guided imagery to relax and refresh your senses
- Use deep breathing exercises to ease stress
- Maintain a moderate level of physical activity (i.e. walk around the hospital three times a day)
- Take a warm bath or shower
- Get a massage or facial
- Pray or meditate at the hospital chapel
- Write letters to friends or relatives
- Accept the support of friends and family to give you a break from the hospital on a consistent basis
- Maintain healthy eating habits



Resources

Child Life and Expressive Therapies have a number of resources for parents regarding various issues related to your child's stay in the hospital. These resources can be checked out from the Child Life Office on the Pediatric Unit at your convenience.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact Child Life and Expressive Therapies at **715-387-7361** or **1-800-782-8581, ext. 7-7361**.



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