

Family Education Sheet

Getting Ready for Your Child's Hospital Experience



Boston Children's Hospital
Until every child is well™

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Your child's upcoming hospital stay or procedure can affect many areas of your family's life. And it can be a very emotional time. As you prepare your child for his hospital experience, it's just as important to prepare yourself.

What are caregivers' common feelings?

Knowing that your child is going to stay at the hospital or have a procedure may bring up many feelings. These often come and go throughout the entire health care experience. Common feelings are anxiety, fear, worry, helplessness, shock, guilt, anger, numbness, relief and sadness.

Children often sense their parents' feelings. Allowing yourself time to experience your own feelings will help you better support your child.

Can I ask questions ahead of time?

Yes. It can be very helpful to learn more about the hospital, your child's condition and what will happen at the hospital. You may want to write down your questions. Here are questions you may want to ask:

- What should I tell my child about the procedure or operation?
- What will happen right before the operation or procedure?
- How long will the procedure or operation take?
- May I stay with my child during the procedure?
- Where will I wait during the procedure or operation?
- Will I be told how my child is doing during the procedure or operation?
- When will I be able to see my child?
- Will my child be in pain?
- How long will my child stay in the hospital?
- How long will it be before my child can go back to school and play?

What should I tell staff about my child?

Remember that you know your child best. Be sure to tell your child's doctors, nurses and other caregivers about your child's personality and experiences with health care. For example, tell staff if your child is afraid of blood tests. They can often find ways to make the experience less upsetting.

How can I care for myself during the hospital stay?

It's hard to support your child and family if you don't take care of yourself physically and emotionally. Here are some tips:

- **If possible, take turns with another caregiver** who can sleep at the hospital with your child. Make a schedule before coming to the hospital.
- **Take breaks.** Take a walk or go for a cup of coffee. Ask the Child Life specialist if a volunteer could stay with your child while you take a break.
- **Talk with friends and family** about your worries and concerns.
- **Learn how to do deep breathing and relaxation exercises.** Watch programs about this on Channel 28, the hospital's Education and Relaxation channel.
- **Exercise regularly.** Stop by the Hale Family Center for Families, or ask your social worker or Child Life specialist about using the gym near the hospital.
- **Ask about a parent coffee hour** on your child's unit or support groups you can join.
- **Keep a journal** about your hospital experiences.
- **Plan time** to see and spend with your other children, if you have them.
- **If your child's other parent is part of your child's life but you are not a couple,** decide which one of you will be with your child at different times. Let your child know the plan.

What if I have a family issue?

- **If you have a restraining order** against your child's other parent, bring a copy of it with you. Show it to the social worker at the hospital.
- **If you're worried about domestic violence** and are not connected to a social worker in the hospital, please call the Advocacy for Women and Kids in Emergencies (AWAKE) Program at (617) 355-6369. An AWAKE social worker is available 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Friday. Outside of those hours, call (617) 355-6369 to speak to the Child Protection consultant on call.

Who is on my child's care team?

Boston Children's Hospital is a teaching hospital. This means that doctors, nurses and other health care professionals who are training may care for your child. Each person in training works under the supervision of a senior professional staff person. Some members of your child's health care team are:

- An **attending physician** is a senior medical doctor who directs your child's care.
- A **fellow** is a medical doctor in training who specializes in one area. An example is someone studying to be a cardiologist (a heart doctor).
- A **resident** is a medical doctor who is training in pediatrics (caring for children).
- A **nurse practitioner** is a nurse with special training diagnosing, treating and caring for patients.
- A **staff nurse** is the nurse who takes care of your child throughout the day and night. There is always a staff nurse responsible for your child's nursing care.
- A **clinical assistant** is a person trained to help the staff nurse.
- A **chaplain** can offer spiritual support. Chaplains are good listeners who can help you in difficult times.
- A **social worker** is a health care professional who meets with your family to help you cope with illness and hospitalization.
- **Child Life specialists** can enhance your child's emotional, social and mental growth during a hospital stay through play.
- A **resource specialist** helps you find resources in the hospital and the community, like short-term housing and transportation to the hospital.
- A **patient care coordinator** is a nurse who follows your children's care from before you come to the hospital to after you go home. This nurse shares information with your insurance company and helps arrange home care services your child may need.
- A **psychiatrist or psychologist** is a doctor who works with your family to help you manage feelings about being in the hospital.

What services are available?

- **The Inpatient Business Office** is on the first floor on the Main Campus next to the Cashier's window. Staff members can help you with questions about hospital bills and health insurance. (617) 355-7114
- **The Outpatient Financial Center** is in the Fegan Lobby on the first floor near Outpatient Registration. Staff members can help you with question about hospital bills and health insurance. (617) 355-5999
- **The Hale Family Center for Families** supports families through their experience at the hospital. You can contact the center before you arrive, during your stay or after you go home. Staff answer questions, connect you with resources and suggest services you may need, like where to stay near the hospital. It has wellness programs, access to computers, a children's activity space and more. (617) 355-6279
- The **Cultural Navigator Program** volunteers are available to connect you to hospital services in a culturally appropriate manner and help you navigate the hospital. (617) 919-3839
- **The Lactation Support Program** offers pregnant women and nursing mothers breastfeeding education and support. (617) 355-6279
- **Chaplains** connect with families of every faith. Support they provide includes conversation and prayers before surgery and bedside visits. (617) 355-6664
- **The Children's Coping Clinic** evaluates, treats and supports your family as you face hospitalization and other health related concerns. At the clinic, you meet with a psychologist or psychiatrist to talk over your concerns, ask questions and learn how to help your child. (617) 355-6688
- **Family Navigators** can support your family by taking you to clinics, giving you information and directions and access to services. Navigators can help with wheelchairs, car-seat carriers and support with luggage storage. (617) 355-6279
- **Interpreter Services** arranges for interpreters in more than 35 languages. You may request an interpreter before you come to the hospital. If you need an interpreter while you are in the hospital, please ask your child's nurse or page an interpreter at (617) 355-6369.

For more information

If you have any questions of concerns, please contact.

- The Hale Family Center for Families
617-355-6279 or
center.families@childrens.harvard.edu
- Child Life Program: 617-355-6551

This Family Education Sheet is available in Arabic and Spanish.