

Health Care Professional's Resource: Helping With Hospital Visits

Preparing Children for Visits – Encourage Parents To...

- Prepare children and teens for what they will see and hear when visiting or attending an appointment with a relative who is receiving medical care in a hospital, cancer clinic, hospice, or at home.
- Plan visits in advance so that the child or teen can be prepared.
- Discuss specific fears or questions their child(ren) might have.
- Follow up with the child after visits: what was positive/negative about it, ask about questions, fears, etc.

Coming and Going

- Reassure children that they can leave whenever they wish. Recommend that someone the child trusts be available to leave with the child if they want to leave and neither parent can go with them.
- Suggest that they can bring something to play with or read as a helpful distraction.
- If a child does not want to visit during a hospital stay, parents might suggest other ways to stay in touch with the ill person (phone calls, email, video recordings, making cards or sending artwork or photos).

Understanding Sights and Sounds

- Offer to explain, or suggest that the parents explain:
 - Medical equipment that will be used (IV, imaging machines, etc.).
 - The setting, i.e., what a chemotherapy room looks like. Showing children pictures can be helpful.
 - How the procedure is done and what they can expect to happen afterward, i.e., will the person feel sick, tired, need help getting up?
 - What they can expect the person to do: Can they have a normal conversation, be touched or hugged?

Special Suggestions for Parents to Do to Support Siblings

- Introduce the well children to hospital or clinic staff by name (i.e., not simply “Aaron’s sister,” but “my daughter, Emily”) and talk a bit about their interests or recent accomplishments (i.e., “She’s the musician in the family.” “He’s just received a scholarship to university next year, to study Biology.”)
- Provide a small gift at the hospital for the well child. (The ill child will likely have a roomful of gifts, cards, etc.)

Enhancing Your Hospital or Treatment Centre to Support Families

- Provide a Children and Teens’ Centre for play or reading, or somewhere to go for a break while visiting
- Set up an information centre or bookstand for kids
- Provide information for parents about cancer’s impact on children (this can be added to the information package they receive upon diagnosis)
- Hand out Child and Teen Welcome Bags for visiting children containing age-appropriate books, journals, activities, stuffed animals, etc. for pre-schoolers, school-age kids, and teenagers
- Provide a Sibling Mail Box (or a general “Mail Box”) with paper, envelopes, stickers and stamps so patients can easily send mail home to a sibling or child
- Create wall displays at the hospital or treatment centre with photos or artwork from children/siblings