

Children Visiting Intensive Care Units

Children less than 13-years old

The hospital, and especially the ICU, is a scary place for a child. It is very important for family visits during hospitalizations. But children may be very emotional and have many questions concerning the patient. If you wish to set up a scheduled visit for a child with a Child Life Specialist, please speak with a member of our staff. They will call our Child Life Specialist who will come speak with and prepare the child for the visit. It must be the child's choice to want to visit their loved one. A visiting adult should always be available to accompany the child to the waiting room when the child decides to end the visit.

When should a child visit a patient in the hospital?

- When they have a close relationship to the patient.
- The more serious the situation, the more important the visit.
- It should be the child's decision to visit.
- There are other ways for a child to stay in touch if he/she chooses not to visit the patient. He/she may choose to talk with the patient on the phone if possible. He/she may want to draw a picture, write a letter, or text the patient.

Before the Visit

- The child should be given a brief description of the equipment in room (IV's, beeping monitors, etc.).
- The child should be told that they have to stay in the patient's room or at the bedside during the visit. The child should be told exactly what the patient looks like today, for example: swollen, bandages, tube in mouth, etc. It is better for the child to express his or her feelings in a private place before entering the patient's room. The child should be told that if the patient is in Isolation that they will have to wear a mask, gown, or gloves during the entire visit.
- The child should have input regarding how long the visit should last. Do not encourage a child to stay longer than he wants, or leave earlier when they are expressing the desire to stay. Some children visit less than a minute while some prefer a longer time. Body language will often give insight into a child's desire to stay or go.
- The child should be told that they must sanitize their hands prior to entering the room and upon exiting.

During the Visit

- If the patient cannot talk, encourage the child to talk to the patient. It can be what they did that day, what is going on at school, or any activity of interest to the child. The child may choose to remain quiet, and that is okay too.

- Tell the child that it is okay to touch the patient or give them a kiss on the cheek or forehead. They may choose not to touch the patient on the first visit.
- Younger children should never be left alone with the patient.

After the Visit

- The child may be very emotional when they leave the hospital room. If the patient looks very different during the hospitalization it would be good to have picture of the patient before they got sick. Remind the child that this is the person they visited.
- Suggest that they remember how he/she looked before all this happened and the fun things they did together.

Babies Visiting

Patients that are parents or grandparents need to see their child or grandchild. However, babies under 9-months lack a good immune system. There are precautions that need to be taken in order to ensure that the baby is not harmed by the visit. Nurses should allow the well parent or family to stay close to the baby during the visit. Nurses should avoid touching the baby. The baby should not be set down on the floor or on the patient's bed. The baby should not be fed or have a diaper change while in the room.

Guidelines for Visiting a Patient with Isolation Precautions

- Children have to follow the same precautions that adults must follow: wearing a gown, gloves, and/or mask.
- Hand washing guidelines should be followed.
- Family members should be discouraged from bringing infants under 9-months to visit patient on isolation.

Other Information

- Children should never be left alone with the patient
- A parent or guardian, who is not the patient, must supervise children at all times.
- Please do not allow children to crawl on the floor – this is for their safety.
- Please do not allow children to pull on the equipment or push button on the equipment – this is for the safety of the patient.
- Please may sure the child does not run around or talk loud – this is for the safety & comfort of the child and patient. When the child gets restless the visiting adult should take the child to the waiting room.

Thank you for working with us to make the child's visit is a positive experience. Please let us know if you have any questions.