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Helping Children visit Adult Units

Speak to a member of your loved one's healthcare team (nurse, social worker, chaplain, child life specialist, manager) if you are interested in trying to arrange a visit for a child into an adult unit. They can let you know if a visit is possible and coordinate a best time to ensure the patient is ready for a visit.

This handout will provide information about how to support a child and plan a visit.

Helping children understand the hospital environment

Medical Term	Child-friendly words to use
Intravenous (I.V.)	A little straw on a patient's hand, connected to a tube that can give them water, medicine or blood.
IV Pumps	An IV Pump helps deliver water, medicine or blood to the patient at the right speed.
Monitors	Machines that watch your body. They make beeping noises to let us know how the patient is doing.
Intensive Care Unit (ICU)	A place in the hospital where the nurses and doctors closely watch and care for patients.
Oxygen Mask	An oxygen mask will give the patient lots of fresh air if they patient is having trouble breathing.
Intubation Tube Ventilator	When someone has trouble breathing on their own, tubes and machines can help.
NG Tube	This tube can either suction yucky stuff out of the patient's stomach, or help bring them nutrition.
Personal Protective Equipment	Gowns, gloves, masks, and goggles that people wear to protect themselves and patients from germs.
Pulse Oximetry Pulse Ox	This is a soft little clip or wrap that goes on a patient's finger or toe. It tells us how good the patient is breathing and how fast their heart is beating.

Visits can be beneficial for children but planning is important



Research has shown that children generally find visiting sick loved ones helpful by reducing their feelings of anxiety and separation and increasing feelings of relief and release.

However, children should not be forced to visit if they do not wish to do so.

It is also important to check with the patient (if they are alert) to ask if they would like a visit from the child. Some people do not want children to see them in a medically fragile state.

A potential visit will also depend on the medical status of the patient so it is important to speak to your healthcare team.

Two key factors that make for a more positive visit include preparing the child prior to the visit and ensuring the child does not wait for an extended duration prior to the visit in a waiting room. Excessive waiting can increase feelings of anxiety and restlessness. Bring an activity in case you do wait and a comfort item such as a stuffed animal.

When is it better not to visit?

When a loved one's appearance is markedly different you may decide to not have the child visit or postpone the visit. Unless this is the last opportunity that child will have to see their loved one, postponing may be preferred.

Even if the child will not be visiting their loved one, they can feel involved in many other ways: make a letter, card or drawing to decorate the patient's hospital room and/or send a personal item or gift from the child. Virtual visits can be arranged using cell phones or iPads.

You should also cancel or postpone your visit if the child has any signs of contagious illness such as fever, cough, rash, vomiting, cold or flu.

How to prepare a child prior to their visit to an adult unit

- How you prepare the child for their visit will depend on their developmental age and understanding. If you are having difficulty finding the right words, connect with a member of the healthcare team (nurse, social worker, chaplain, child life specialist).
- Explain the patient's condition to the child so that interpretation is not left up to the child's imagination. Provide an honest, accurate, developmentally appropriate explanation. Encourage the child to ask questions.

- Prepare the child by describing the environment in the unit and patient's room. What will they see, hear, smell? Photos and YouTube videos of machine sounds may help. What are the medical devices the child will see and how are they helping their loved one? Tell them about the people they will see in the unit: other patients and various staff wearing protective gear. By having this discussion ahead of time, the child will be able to focus better on their visit without distraction, distress and confusion.

Helping the child during and following their visit

- Plan a brief visit for the child and patient (approx. 10 minutes). Guide the child during the visit with what they can do: hold loved one's hand and talk to them. Do not leave empty minutes as the child's attention will drift to the ICU environment.
- Remember that the focus of this visit is solely for the child, you may return later for a longer visit and to have your own time.
- During and following the visit ask the child if they have questions and how they are feeling.
- If this is potentially the last time the child may see their loved one you may wish to take some photos. Other legacy items may be available from your healthcare team.