

# Tips for Parents During and After Hospitalization



## Working with the health care team during your child's hospitalization

### PARENT SUGGESTIONS

- » Don't be afraid to ask questions. Some parents keep a pad of paper to write down their questions. This way, when the health care team comes to examine your child, you will be prepared. If you don't understand the answer, let the medical team know and ask again. Ask your doctor to write down the name of your child's injuries or illness.
- » Stay overnight with your child, if possible. Ask permission to be with your child during medical tests and procedures, if you want to be there.
- » Be sure to let the medical team know of any pre-existing medical conditions, allergies your child has, and other special needs and fears. Tell the medical team as much as you can tell them about how the injury happened.
- » You are your child's most important advocate – ask how you can get involved in your child's care and when you can make decisions about treatment. Let your health care team know if your child is in pain
- » Take time for yourself. It is important to take breaks as often as you need them. Take a shower; make some phone calls; get something to eat or drink; or go to a quiet space (outside, chapel etc.) to think, reflect or just cry – whatever it is that you need for yourself. After your break, you will feel better able to support your child. Let your child's health care team know when you leave your child's bedside and when you return.
- » Make a list of what other people can do to help you. When people call and offer support, you will have something concrete to ask them to do. You do not need to do it all.
- » Ask the health care team to help you schedule all of your outpatient visits before you leave the hospital.
- » Make sure that your child's pain is under control before you leave the hospital.
- » Make sure that you have a good phone number to call if you have questions when you return home.

### TIPS FOR SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD WHILE IN THE HOSPITAL

- » You are the best person to help your child.
- » Be patient with your child.
- » Help your child understand what is happening.
- » Gently offer to talk about feelings and/or events with your child, but do not force them to talk about it if they do not want to. Let your child know that it is OK to feel a little upset; many children feel upset, worried, or confused after getting hurt. Allow your child to talk about their feelings if they want to. If they do not want to talk, suggest and encourage coping strategies for kids, which can include writing a story or drawing a picture.
- » Check your own feelings – if these feelings are “too big” you may overwhelm your child, and they may suppress their own reaction and try to take care of you instead.
- » Help your child see the staff as helpers.
- » Stay with your child (or have a family member or friend stay) as much as possible.
- » Take care of yourself.
- » Bring things from home to make your child comfortable – bath robe, toys, and favorite books.

### TIPS FOR SUPPORTING YOUR TEEN WHILE IN THE HOSPITAL

- » Be honest with your teen.
- » Include your teen in medical discussions when possible.
- » Encourage your child's health care team to talk with your teen directly and let him answer his own questions. Your child might want to talk alone with the doctors; try to support that decision.
- » Remember that teens can be self-conscious, and they may worry about how they will look and fit in with others. They may also worry about their privacy.
- » Help your teen stay connected with old friends, as well as make new friends in the hospital.
- » Bring things from home to make your teen comfortable – bath robe, music, and magazines.
- » Call your teen's school to let them know what has happened.

# Tips for Parents During and After Hospitalization



## Working with the health care team after your child's hospitalization

### PARENT SUGGESTIONS

- » Make sure to keep all of your appointments even if your child is feeling better.
- » Many parents like to keep all of their child's injury information together in a binder or folder. In the front of the binder, keep a sheet with your child's diagnosis and all of the medicines that your child is taking. Keep a calendar with all of the appointments.
- » Keep a pad of paper around the house to write down questions for your doctor or other healthcare professional as you think of them. Encourage your child to keep track of her questions, too.
- » You are your child's most important advocate – ask how you can get involved in your child's care and when you can make decisions about treatment. Let your health care team know if your child is in pain or is having other reactions that concern you or your child.
- » Make sure that you have a good phone number to call if you have questions. Also, ask what you should look for and when to call.
- » Ask for a summary of every visit to take with you, if possible.
- » If you find that you are missing a lot of work, you might want to look into obtaining Family Medical Leave. In 1993, the federal government passed a law that allows families to take some time to care for family members without fear of losing their job.

### TIPS FOR HELPING YOUR CHILD AT FOLLOW-UP VISITS

- » Tell your child about the appointment a few days in advance. Explain the reason for the visit, using words your child can understand. Answer questions simply and honestly.
- » Find out, in advance, if the visit will involve any painful or scary procedures. If so, talk with your physician about how to prepare for these procedures and if any medicine should be given, in advance.
- » Let your child know you'll be there throughout the entire appointment unless your child wants some time to talk with the physician or specialist alone. Encourage your child's physician to ask your child questions directly. Encourage your child to ask the doctors and nurses questions.

### At the Follow-up Visit: Resources for Families

- » Most hospitals have staff who are experienced with helping other parents and caregivers in your situation. If you are upset, have questions about how to help your child, about financial or insurance issues, or just need to talk, please seek out someone at the hospital who is available to assist you and your family. This may be a:
  - Social Worker
  - Chaplain
  - Or a mental health professional, such as a psychologist or psychiatrist.

### SELF CARE FOR PARENTS WHILE DEALING WITH A CHILD'S INJURY OR HOSPITALIZATION

#### Taking care of yourself: Re-experiencing

- » Talk with friends or family about your own experiences and feelings about your child's injury.
- » Help yourself deal with overwhelming or troubling thoughts by learning how to "take a break" from them at times - do something fun, spend time with friends, get busy with other activities.
- » If talking with your child about his or her reactions makes you feel upset or worried, it's especially important to find someone who can be a listening ear for you.

#### Taking care of yourself: Avoidance

- » Notice when you feel worried or nervous - are there situations in which this seems to happen more?
- » If avoiding reminders is keeping you from doing important things, enlist a friend or family member to help you - ask them to encourage you to keep doing those things and congratulate you when you do!
- » Be especially careful that any new worries you might have don't stop you from letting your child do things that are safe and appropriate for his /her age. Use a friend or family member as a "reality check" for yourself.
- » Try to make yourself do just one or two activities or spend time with friends, even if you don't really feel like it at first. Sometimes "just doing it" can be the first step to feeling a little better.

#### Taking care of yourself: Hyper-arousal

- » Remember that feeling a bit jumpy or worried is a natural reaction to going through something scary, and that it will get better with time.
- » Even if you can only get a short break from caring for your child, home, or work, use it to get some exercise and do things that relax you – go for a walk, relax with a funny movie or a good book.
- » Try to keep some daily routines the same.
- » Try to get to bed at a regular time, and to make the hour before bed a relaxing time.
- » Be especially careful not to increase your smoking or alcohol use to deal with stress.

#### Getting extra help for yourself

- » Think about getting some extra help if your own feelings and reactions after your child's injury/illness are bothering you, or are making it harder for you to help your child get back into normal activities