



children
in
hospital
IRELAND

Making hospital a happier place for children
through play and advocacy

“I am going to hospital!”

A pocket guide
for children,
parents and carers



Prepare your child for a stay in hospital

In the case of a forthcoming stay in hospital your child should know what to expect and what they may have to undergo.

- Talk about hospital as a cheerful place where doctors and nurses help to make people better.
- Explain to your child why he / she is being admitted to hospital.
- Reassure your child that you will be there as much as possible and that their stay in hospital will be temporary.
- Encourage your child to ask questions and express feelings.
- If you have arranged to stay overnight in the hospital tell your child and if not, reassure him / her that you will visit frequently.
- Involve your child in packing their bag for the hospital stay; make sure to include their favourite toy, special teddy bear or security blanket.
- Infection control is vitally important in hospitals and so it is a good idea to boil wash any soft toy or security blanket – if possible – and pack it in a ziplock bag.
- Teenagers should be encouraged to talk about going to hospital as sometimes they may give the impression that they understand more than they do, but often they may be anxious about the situation.



Children shall be admitted to hospital only if the care they require cannot be equally well provided at home or on a daily basis.

Supporting your child

In almost all hospitals where children are in-patients, parents / carers are allowed and encouraged to stay with the child overnight – hospitals will make provision for this.

In some hospitals there can be a designated parent / day room to take a break away from the ward.

Accommodation should be offered to all parents and they should be helped and encouraged to stay.



ON THE WARD

Who looks after my child?

There will be nurses on the wards. If you have any questions speak to them first.

Doctors & Nurses working in paediatrics (children's medicine) are specially trained to treat children.

The Consultant is the most senior member of the medical team, and they will have other doctors working with them. The consultant will usually meet you and your child to talk about their condition and treatment.

Hospital Play Specialists are specially trained staff who organise play in hospital and help prepare children for their treatment. Children in Hospital Ireland (CHI) volunteers work alongside hospital play specialists.

What about eating and drinking?

Children's meals will be provided by the hospital at set times. If you wish to give your child any other food, you must first check with the nurse responsible for the child's care that this is appropriate – many children are on special needs diets and so staff need to know exactly what they are eating.

Be careful not to leave food where it can be accessed by other children.

If you stay in the hospital, you will be expected to provide your own food and there is often a hospital cafeteria you can use.

How can I help?

You can care for your child in hospital as you would at home, by washing, changing, feeding and putting them to bed yourself.

Don't be afraid to ask hospital staff how you can be involved.

Playing with & reading to you child will provide distraction.

Children shall have full opportunity for play, recreation and education suited to their age and condition and shall be in an environment designed, furnished, staffed and equipped to meet their needs.



How can I have a break if I stay?

Explain to the child where you are going and when you will be back. Don't be surprised if they are upset – they may feel vulnerable and it's much better for them to express their emotions rather than bottle them up.

If you leave the hospital, for example, to go home, always tell the staff that you are going and when you expect to be back. On your return, make sure to inform the staff.

CHI volunteers are trained to play with children in hospital and can often provide respite for a parent who needs to leave their child for a couple of hours.

STAYING AND VISITING

What if I can't stay?

If you cannot stay, talk to the nurse in charge or named nurse about how you can keep up to date about your child's progress and welfare. You can, for example, stay in touch with the named nurse by phone.

Mobile phones can be used in certain areas in some hospitals but not in clinical areas including wards. Check where mobiles may be used as children may wish to phone or text.

Can relatives or friends help?

Sharing staying or visiting with other people can give you some time off and allow you to spend time at home with the rest of your family. Inform the ward staff of the names of relatives and friends who may be visiting in your absence so that they know who is involved with your child.

Visitors are important, but too many can be tiring and any child will appreciate visits more if they are spread out.

Children and parents shall have the right to be informed in a manner appropriate to age and understanding.



It is important that other children in the family do not feel excluded. Include them as much as possible, and talk to them about what is happening to their sibling.

Encouraging siblings and friends to write a card, make a present, or talk on the phone (if possible) can help everyone to feel better about the situation.

How can I support and console my child during medical examinations or the preparation for anaesthesia?

Whenever possible, you should accompany your child to medical examinations. Make sure to bring his / her favourite toy. Any form of restraint during examinations should be avoided eg: holding the child with force. Experienced doctors, nurses and hospital play specialists will apply various established strategies of distraction in order to help the child overcome his / her fears.

Make use of the play specialist or hospital play volunteer, where possible, who will use toys, crafts and storytelling to play with your child.

Explain as much as possible to your child.

For example, tell them that before they are brought to the operating theatre, they may have some special cream rubbed on to numb the skin where the needle for the anaesthetic goes, so that it won't hurt as much. Alternatively, they may be asked to breathe in some special air (anaesthetic) to make them sleepy.

Your child will spend time in the recovery area. When he / she returns to the ward he / she needs to rest and sleep as much as possible to aid recovery. Nurses keep a close eye on patients recovering from an operation and they will tell you when it is safe for them to drink, sit up, eat or go to the bathroom.

Top tips for a happier stay in hospital

- Visit our website www.childreninhospital.ie/parents for information.
- Contact the hospital for any specific information you need – for example, about parking, accommodation, etc.
- Explain things to small children on a step-by-step basis but not too far in advance – a few days before admission is early enough for a five year old.
- Make sure children know that they are coming home again but don't specify a particular day.
- Explain to older children what is happening. Use words they will understand as children can misunderstand terms they're not familiar with; this can result in their experiencing of increased anxiety.
- Don't promise it will not hurt – it might. Be truthful and talk about ways to manage pain.
- Bring a favourite toy or blanket (no matter how scruffy) – you can boil wash it and bring in a ziplock plastic bag to aid infection control – where possible.
- Tell the nurse any special names you use for food, the potty etc.
- Play with and cuddle your child.
- Provide constant reassurance to your child that you and other family members love them and will always care for them. This in itself is an important "medicine".
- Have books, comics, puzzles, and art materials to hand, so that the child can

readily engage in his or her favourite activity.

Prepare yourself for Hospital

- Contact Children in Hospital Ireland (CHI) to find out about our volunteer play service and how our volunteers may help you.
www.childreninhospital.ie / (01) 290 3510
- Find out as much as you can about the hospital – check its advice leaflet.
 - Accommodation situation
 - Use of canteen for meals and snacks
 - Use of phone (mobiles may be restricted)
 - Costs involved
 - Parking situation and coins for parking if required.
- Arrange with relatives and friends to be available to visit your child or to stay if you need to leave the hospital.
- Wear light clothes (hospitals can be very warm).
- Bring something to pass the time.
- Be considerate of others, don't make noise at night.

Children and parents have the right to informed participation in all decisions involving their health care.



Children shall be cared for together with children who have the same developmental needs and shall not be admitted to adult wards.



Going Home

- Before leaving the hospital, make sure you know all about your child's aftercare.
- Write down instructions about food, medicine, etc.
- Check the date and time of your child's follow-up appointments.
- Don't worry if your child is difficult and demanding on their return home; a child will usually go through a re-adjustment period but this will pass.
- Encourage your child to talk about his / her experience in hospital and listen carefully to what they have to say. Constantly reassure your child of your love and care.

Who are Children in Hospital Ireland (CHI)

Children in Hospital Ireland is a volunteer membership-based organisation. Its core aim is to make hospital a happier place for children by providing play facilitation services for them and offering support and information for their parents and families.

Play in a hospital setting

The importance of play in the recovery of the hospitalised child is well-recognised. Familiar play activities provide reassurance and comfort to young children, while group activities occupy older children who may be nervous or bored and can help them make new friends.

Since its foundation in 1970, CHI has been promoting the importance of play for children in hospital and its role in recovery. Today our volunteers bring fun and enjoyment to children in many hospitals around Ireland. CHI volunteers work in cooperation with hospital play specialists and ward staff to organise play activities in the playroom, on the ward, in emergency and outpatient departments.

Children shall be treated with tact and understanding and their privacy shall be respected at all times.



Our clouds contain the text of six of the Articles of the Charter for Children in Hospital, which has been drawn up by the European Association for Children in Hospital (EACH). The full text of the Charter and its annotations are available from the website of EACH (www.each-for-sick-children.org).

How you can help

- Make a donation which directly helps us organise play activities and fun events and buy much needed crayons, toys and other supplies. www.childreninhospital.ie/your-donation
- Join our enthusiastic volunteer team – email info@childreninhospital.ie
- Become a member and receive our latest news and information – email info@childreninhospital.ie
- Sponsor us / become a corporate donor. www.childreninhospital.ie/corporate-support

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