

ADMISSIONS TO HOSPITAL

This fact sheet has been written by parent carers for parent carers.
Clinical information has been approved by West Sussex practitioners.



Staying away from home can be a frightening experience for anyone, especially if we are unwell, around people we don't know, and things happen to us without any warning. This is how in-patient treatment might seem to a child but there is a lot we can do to make stays in hospital better.

Preparing for a hospital stay

Check whether your child really needs to be admitted. Sometimes disabled children are admitted for a minor ailment that could be treated in the community. Could your GP be supported to feel more confident about managing your child's everyday health needs? If your child's condition is likely to be unstable over a long period, try to negotiate an open admissions policy with the hospital, rather than using A&E. Familiar faces are reassuring.

Ask if the hospital has information or support to prepare children for hospital. Some hospitals will have a picture book or website that you can look at. Or they may have specialist staff who are trained to help your child prepare for a visit beforehand. See the 'Ask about' section below.

Try to be honest with your child. Let them know that some days are likely to be painful or frustrating. Some treatment will hurt and sometimes they can't choose.

Ask about staying with your child in hospital. Children have the right to have their parents stay with them in hospital. You can stay with your child through any alarming procedures like being in the anaesthetic room until they go to sleep before surgery or in the recovery room afterwards.

Prepare a folder of important information about your child. You can share this with hospital staff once they're admitted. Lots of hospitals now have a 'Health Passport' for you to complete to help staff easily learn how your child communicates, their toileting needs, how they show pain, etc. See the 'Ask about' section below.

If your child is having an operation, ask if they can be first on the list for theatre. Your child may find it harder to cope without food or drink before a general anaesthetic. If they are likely to be distressed or confused, it's OK to request the earliest theatre slot but you may need to be assertive.

Help your child stay in touch with friends and with school by email, it will make returning to school easier if they miss a lot. Most hospitals now have public WiFi so ask about this before their stay. If you don't have a laptop or tablet, see if you can borrow one. And ask about your hospital's teaching service (see Ask about below).

If you have any religious or cultural needs, ask the hospital how they will manage these during your child's stay. Hospitals should be sensitive to this, but it may not occur to staff to tell you what is possible, unless you ask.

During a hospital stay

Expect a safe and secure environment. If a situation feels risky, don't be afraid to explain your concerns. Negotiate what can be put in place to minimise the potential, say, for your child to self injure or wander off. This may mean staying with your child.





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Make sure you ask about the potential risks of different treatments. If you don't, you can't reassure your child or help them make informed decisions. Be sure to tell everyone about any medication your child takes; some lower blood pressure, and new medications may be incompatible.

If your child is on regular medication, check who will administer this while they are in hospital. If you plan to do it, you will need to sign to authorise this. If hospital staff are going to administer meds, expect them to be taken away from you.

Keep sharing information. Don't expect things you have told one department to filter through to the next by the time your child gets there. Be prepared to explain again. Stick important messages to your child's locker or above their bed.

Talk to everyone, whenever you can, so that as many people as possible understand your child's needs, especially support staff. They spend more time on the wards than doctors and are likely to have more time to sit, chat and play, and reassure your child when you cannot be there. Explain to other children in the ward. Get questions out of the way, it lets children get on.

If your child doesn't use speech, explain how they communicate 'yes' and 'no' and show you what they need or want. You may need to teach staff some signs or how to use your child's communication book and, for some children, the importance of asking closed questions, using simple phrases and 'listening on all channels'.

Alert staff to changes in your child's body language, mood or pallor that might indicate they are in pain, too hot or too cold. Not all children can explain how they are feeling.

Help your child to get involved in making choices wherever possible. Medical staff should involve them more as they grow and from 16 they are regarded as an adult in terms of decision making about medical treatment. If you think your teenage child may not be able to make these decisions by themselves or at all, discuss this early with the medical staff as there are guidelines about how this should be handled based on the Mental Capacity Act. If you cannot always be there ask about using an advocate (see Ask about below).

If you are unhappy with any aspect of your child's care speak up. It is best to raise it straightaway with a senior member of staff in the team caring for your child as things can often be sorted out on the ground. But if you remain unhappy there is a clear NHS complaints process. See www.nhs.uk and find out more in the 'Ask about' section below.

Leaving hospital

Ask about discharge planning and assessments of need as early as possible. Agreeing who is responsible for funding nursing care, training, equipment, aids and adaptations at home can be complex and take time so it's worth checking that your child's community nursing team are anticipating their needs early on, or your child's stay in hospital may be longer than either of you would wish. Each hospital has its own discharge policy. Ask to see this before your stay if possible. And don't forget to ask about an assessment of your needs as a carer too.

Ask about

- **Health passport:** Ask for a copy from the Royal Alexandra Children's Hospital (RACH) admitting staff or download from Amaze's website at www.amazebrighton.org.uk/advice-for-parents/health/hospitals. This form was designed by health care workers and parent carers to improve families' experience of health care. Complete as many questions as you wish, keep a copy at home and hand a copy to the admitting Royal Alex member of staff or at a pre-



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admission appointment. Other Brighton and Hove community services can also receive this Health Passport about your child if you wish.

- **RACH Play team:** The **Royal Alex** has a team of play staff who are trained to prepare children for hospital admission and treatment through games and activities. They can also distract your child during certain treatments and act as their advocate to represent their views. If you would like your child to meet a play specialist before coming into hospital, call the ward your child will be admitted to.
- **RACH teaching service:** There are qualified teachers in the **Royal Alex** to provide lessons and learning materials from across the national curriculum. Teaching can either be at the bedside or in the schoolroom on Level 8 of the Alex. Call **01273 696955 extension 2560 or 2561**.
- **Healthwatch:** This is the local information and advice service for health and social care services and they can advise you on what to do if things go wrong. Call **01273 234040** or email: help@healthwatchbrightonandhove.co.uk

Further information

- **Great Ormond Street:** There's lots of useful advice and videos for parents and carers about stays in hospital www.gosh.nhs.uk/parents-and-visitors/advice-when-you-stay
- **NHS advice on discharge from hospital:** www.nhs.uk/Conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/Pages/hospital-discharge-care.aspx
- **My Life Brighton and Hove:** Comprehensive online information about health and social care services in Brighton and Hove at www.mylifebh.org.uk

