

Coping with coronavirus

how to prepare for and manage an inpatient admission

In order to keep children and families as safe as possible, the hospital has had to make some changes. Whilst these changes are important and necessary, we understand that families may have additional worries about coming into hospital at this time. For further information about the changes to expect on admission please use the hospital website, for further questions ask a member of your child's medical team.

We have a series of wellbeing toolkits which have been designed to help parents with information, ideas and strategies about your baby or child coming into hospital. These are based on common questions from parents in this situation and what others have found useful and cover questions or worries that you might have about preparing to come into hospital, coping with a baby or child being in hospital, and supporting siblings with the experience. Many of the ideas will still be relevant at the moment. You can find these here:

<http://www.uhbristol.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/support-for-patients/psychological-health-services/resources/>

However we recognise that the current situation will present additional challenges. With this in mind, we have put together the following ideas that you might find helpful.

Please also see our guide on '**Coping with coronavirus – strategies for parents to support yourselves and children**' for more general advice and tips.

Finding ways to stay connected

1

Use technology (phone calls, texting or video calls) to stay in contact with family members or siblings who cannot be there. Those who are unable to visit could also record messages or read stories so that babies or children can hear their voice.

Encourage your child to engage in activities they enjoy

This goes for both children in hospital and siblings at home. Whilst in hospital this may involve getting creative about adapting activities your child usually enjoys, e.g. playing games online. There are lots of resources available to help with this.

2

Talk to children about their feelings

Again this applies both to children coming into hospital and siblings at home. Help children by talking to them about what is going on and answering questions in a way that is age appropriate and that they understand. Listen to their concerns and try to respond to their reactions in a way that is reassuring.

3

It is also important to let them know that it is understandable and ok that they might find this difficult and let them know why this is needed, e.g. "I am also sad that we can't all visit Charlie together, but I am happy that the doctors are looking after him. The reason you cannot visit him right now is to help keep people safe but we have lots of ways we can still keep in touch".

Supporting siblings

It can be helpful to engage siblings who are not able to visit during the current time in helpful tasks to connect them to their brother or sister. This could include creating a video for them, recording a message or taking a photo for them. We understand that current government guidance and visiting restrictions may have meant that childcare options have become limited for families, and some parents are having to split their time. If possible, try to schedule a time each day for contact between siblings and the parent attending hospital - keeping this regular can support siblings to adjust to the new routine.

4

When children cannot visit, it can be especially important to explain (in an age appropriate way they can understand) why their sibling is in hospital. Sometimes it may feel like we want to avoid talking about the situation in order to protect children, but even young children are able to pick up on what is happening around them and can fill in the gaps with their own explanations and misinterpretations, which can increase worry and anxiety.

Talking gives the opportunity to explore worries or questions and to address these or find ways to manage worry.

Condition-specific information

If you have concerns about coronavirus specifically related to your child's health issues then you can contact their medical team or look at national health websites for specific conditions. The following websites may also be useful:

5

- NHS: www.nhs.uk/coronavirus
- Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH): www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/covid-19-resources-general-public

Ask for professional support

If you find that anxiety or worry about your child's health condition, coming into hospital or having a procedure or surgery is persisting - either for yourself or your child - speak to your child's healthcare team about other sources of support, which may include our psychology team.

6

Also, think about seeking professional support and speaking to your GP if you are finding worries overwhelming, are finding it difficult to cope, or have existing mental health difficulties which may be being worsened by the current situation.